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OF  
MODERN  
INDIA

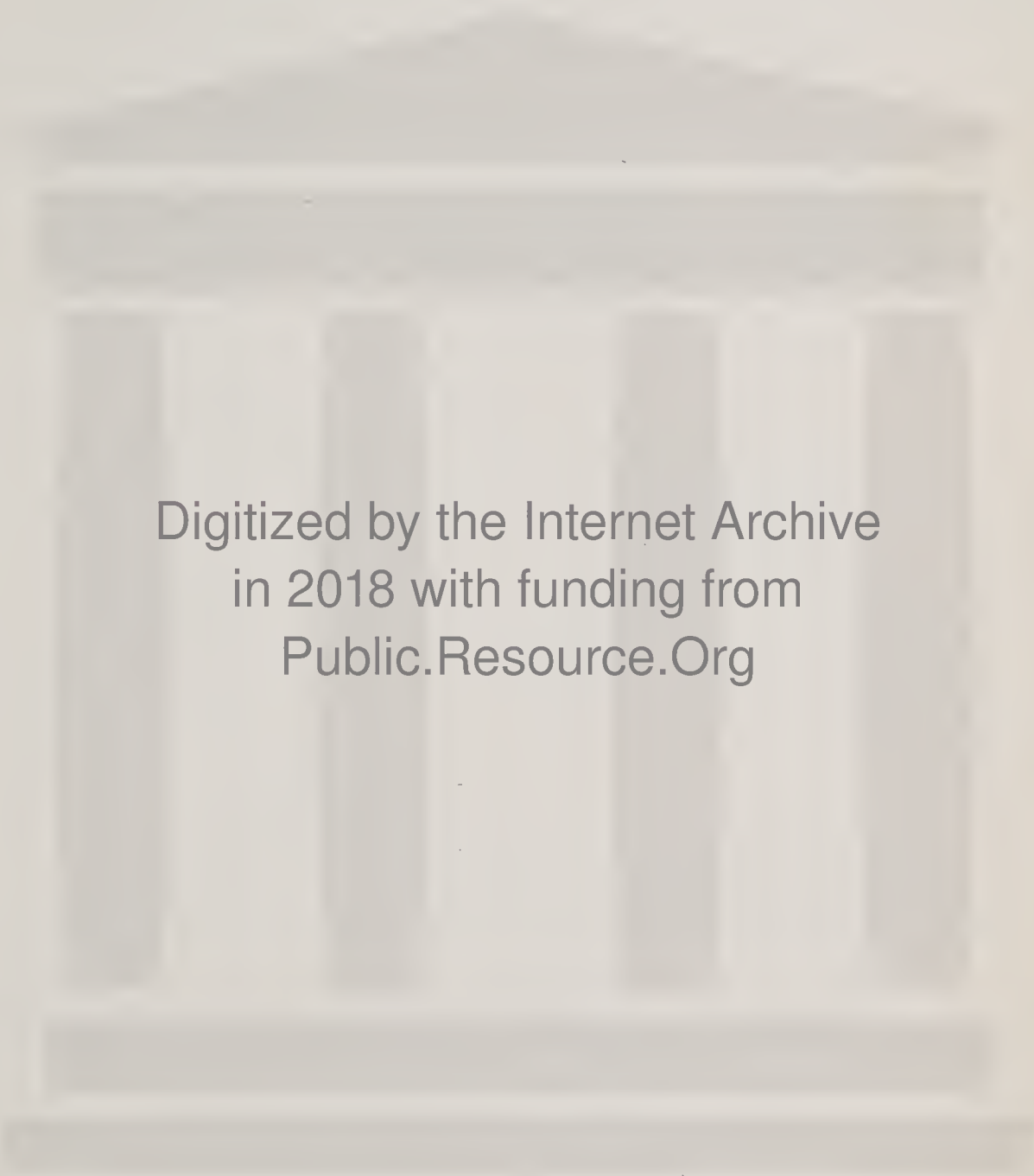
***Keshub Chunder Sen***

***Arun Kumar Mukherjee***



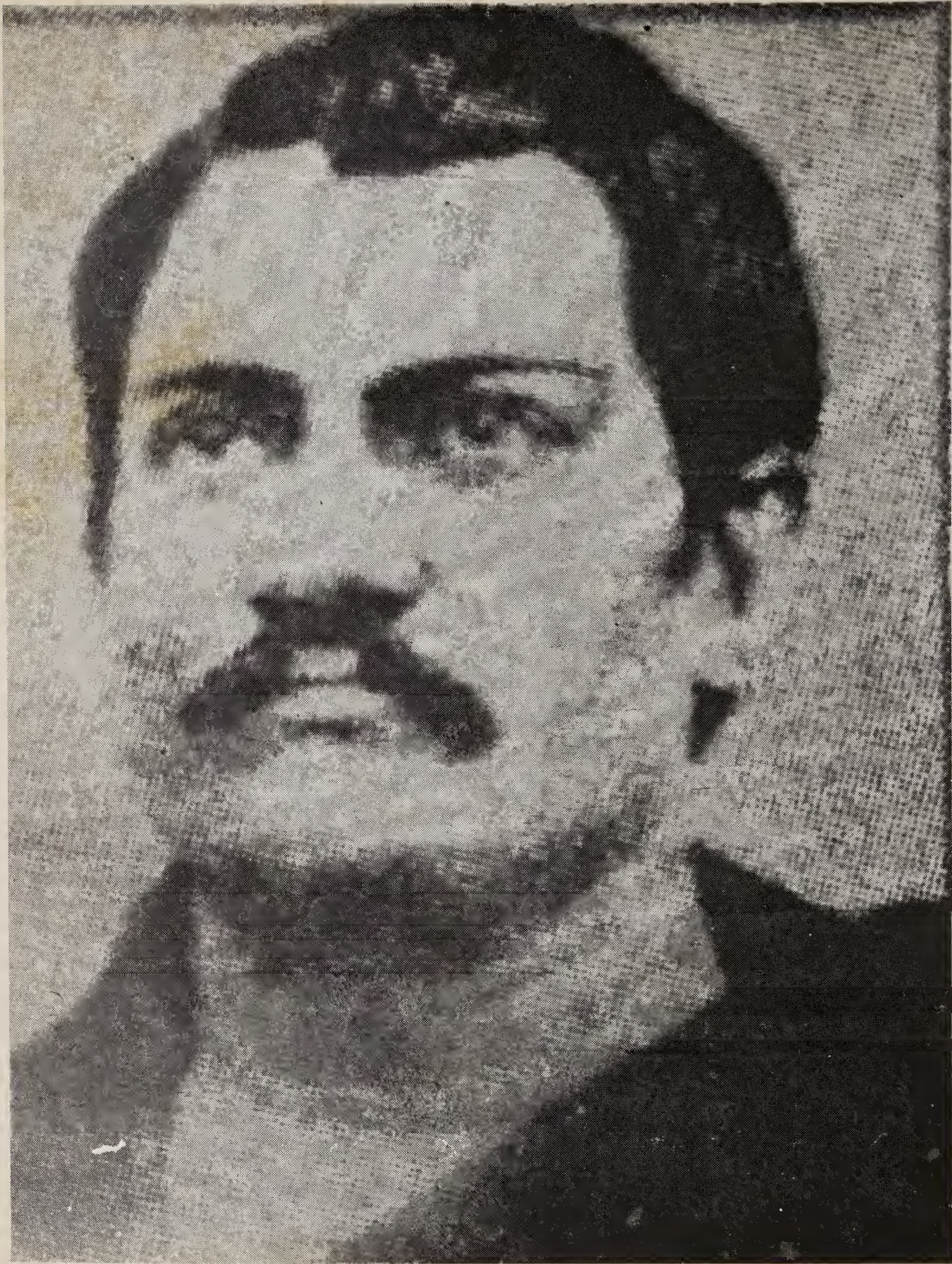






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Keshub Chunder Sen  
(1838-1884)



*BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA*

**Keshub Chunder Sen**

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**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION**

**MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING  
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***To My Father***

***Professor Amulya Dhan  
Mukherji, M.A.,  
P.R.S, F.A.S. (1902-  
1984) Author of  
'Sanskrit Prosody: Its  
Evolution' and 'Bangla  
Chhander Mulsutra'***





## About the Series

THE MAIN PURPOSE of this series is to record the chronicle of struggles and achievements of eminent men and women of India, who have spearheaded our freedom movement and national renaissance. Designed in the form of biographies, these handy volumes, written by knowledgeable people, outline a brief account of the life and contribution of the eminent leaders of this country. These volumes are meant to be constant source of inspiration for the present generation as well as for posterity. These are not intended either to be comprehensive study or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available. Besides, it has not been possible to publish them in a chronological order as the work of writing these volumes are entrusted to a cross-section of people. This Division aims to bring out biographies of all the eminent national personalities within a short period. Widest possible coverage of the great men and women of India under this series is the objective.





## Preface

KESHAB CHANDRA SEN alias Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884) is known all over the world as one of the greatest religious leaders of the nineteenth century. He was also a national hero and a maker of modern India. In his obituary notice Max Mueller wrote, "India has lost her greatest son". A small attempt has been made in the following pages to portray Keshub Chunder Sen as one of the makers of modern India.

This volume on Keshub Chunder Sen in the series 'Builders of Modern India', has been written at the request of the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, and I am grateful to them. I would also like to put on record my sense of gratitude to late Satikumar Chatterji (1900-1984), Secretary, Navavidhan Publication Committee, Calcutta, who readily supplied all the books and journals.

**Arun Kumar Mukherjee**





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## *A Short Biographical Sketch*

### *Early Life*

KESHUB CHUNDER WAS born in an illustrious family of Bengal on 19 November 1838 in Calcutta. He was the grandson of Dewan Ramkamal Sen, the first Indian Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. Keshub's father Paery Mohan died young in 1848, when Keshub was only ten years old. Keshub's mother Sarada Sundari was never indifferent to her religious vows and duties. The virtues of his grandfather and parents were writ large on the personality of Keshub.

Keshub's father Paery Mohan, the second son of Ramkamal, was born in the year 1814. He was very handsome, amiable, kind-hearted, intelligent and refined in tastes, artistic and fond of birds and animals.

He was an affectionate husband, loving father and loyal to his elder brother. As a member of Society, he was most pleasant and noble-hearted. He died young at the age of thirty-four years in 1848.

Keshub's mother Sarada Sundari was born about 1823. She was of a fair complexion, rather tall in height, with a figure well-shaped and well-rounded, with features exquisitely chiselled, wearing over all her handsomeness the sacred veil of classical modesty. Thus she was described by Dr. Prem Sunder

Basu, biographer of Keshub Chunder in his book '*Life and Works of Brahmananda Keshava*'. Her unrestricted sympathies endeared her to her own orthodox relations and the members of the Brahmo Samaj. Keshub said : "Where can there be another mother like you? Your virtues God has given me. All that I call my own is yours."

From two biographies of Keshub written by P.C. Mozoomdar and Prem Sunder Basu, we can have a picture of Keshub Chunder.

He was a fair, calm, good-looking boy; his simple boyish beauty was angelic; he was exceedingly mild and reserved, but without any vanity or conceit. He was fond of fine things of all sorts. His intelligence was great, varied and unusual; he had a wonderful sagacity in making out the secrets of men and things. He was self-conscious and self-willed. He was a noble pure-minded boy, free from falsehood, free from vice. As a boy he was not religious, but certainly very moral; he was invariably mild and gentle and free from every kind of ill-temper, and laboured under a constitutional shyness.

At the age of five, the customary age in Bengal, Keshub was placed under a tutor at home for primary education in 1843.

Upto 1845 he was nursed within the family, amidst Vaishnavic tradition. There he was under the influence of his parents and grandfather Dewan Ramkamal Sen of whom he was a favourite.

Keshub's originality, determination and leadership came from his grandfather. In childhood, he drew children of his age-group round him and made them follow the games he devised, viz., *Nam Mala*, *Kirtan*, *Jatra*, *Niti Katha*, *Prarthana*, *Ratha Jatra* etc., which reflect the Vaishnavic tradition of the family. Besides these, there were other plays e.g. *Magic Show*, *Band Party*, *Post Office*, *Rail train* etc., new Western innovations. In every game he was the leader. He was loved and respected by his companions.

### ***Influence of English Education***

In 1845 Keshub was admitted to the School Section of the Hindu College, the pioneer educational institution in Calcutta imparting English education. At the age of fourteen he was in the first senior class of the school (1852). Next year he was most unwisely transferred to the Metropolitan College, a recently founded rival institution. But this college soon collapsed and Keshub rejoined the Hindu College (1854). His habit of hard work and systematic industry grew during his school-days. After finishing school level education, Keshub continued at the Hindu College (1854-1858) as a general student and chiefly devoted himself to the study of mental and moral philosophy. He was looked upon by students in general as a sort of youthful philosopher.

Among his contemporaries in the Hindu College were Narendra Nath Sen, Chandra Madhab Ghosh, Satyendra Nath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Hem Chandra Bandyopadhyay, Kali Prasanna Sinha, Kristodas Pal, Manmohan Ghosh, Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar. There he came in contact with eminent English teachers and did very well in his studies. English education opened to him a new world of knowledge. He left the college in 1858. In 1856 he was married to Jagamohini Devi (born about 1847), daughter of Chandra Kumar Mozoomdar of Bali near Calcutta. He was engaged in hard studies in 1856 at the Metcalfe Hall Library where everyday he used to sit immersed in books on Western mental and moral philosophy for eight hours at a stretch.

Before he left the Hindu College, Keshub Chunder did some social service and founded a few clubs and institutions which imparted Western education and culture. In 1855, the *British India Society*, an Association for the cultivation of Western science and culture was founded by him. Dr. H. Halliur was its president. Keshub started the Colutolla Evening School in 1855. It was a private school imparting instructions in the general branches of knowledge to the young man of neighbourhood. In 1857, Keshub founded a dramatic club which staged



Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'. He also founded the *Goodwill Fraternity* that year. It was a purely religious institution where he found a group of young devout.

### ***Impact of Brahmo Samaj Movement***

During the period 1856-1858 Keshub Chunder entered the most critical period of his life. He became grave; read Young's 'Night Thoughts'; became deeply immersed in serious thoughts and self-examination.

The backward disunited condition of his countrymen made him depressed. The subjection of his country to the rule of a foreign merchant company, the ill-treatment of the Indigo-planters, the rowdism of tommies and uncivil foreigners sorely wounded his self-respect. The spirited protest of Rev. Long, patriotic poems of Iswarchandra Gupta, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay and Dinabandhu Mitra excited his young mind. The news of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 added fuel to fire. Where was the way out to save his country?

Burning patriotism led him in the quest of finding out a way to change the sad plight of his country. One question tormented him—what is the way for India's redemption? Another question also made him unsettled—how one can reach God?

Two decades back 'Young Bengal'—the young rebels of the Hindu College—declared war against the centuries-old conservatism, bigotry, senseless idolatry, and evil customs of caste system and untouchability, but they were reared up in a godless education. Keshub said, "I did not know. But in the first glimmer of light that came to me I heard the voice, 'Pray, pray, without prayer there is no other way'."

This came from his intense quest, and not from the Christian missionary tracts.

Keshub Chunder looked for light within, light came. One evening in 1857 Keshub held his first devotional meeting with half a dozen of his close friends. "A nameless solemnity, a

thrilling reverence filled every heart, the Eternal spirit of God for the first time seemed a hallowed presence. Keshub spoke, and we all wept." Thus spoke P.C. Mozoomdar.

Keshub established the *Goodwill Fraternity*, a purely religious institution in 1857, where he preached extempore in English with great enthusiasm and moral earnestness, which were communicated to his youthful auditory. Devendranath Tagore, leader of the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj, attended its meetings. Then Keshub quietly joined the Brahmo Samaj (1857) by signing the printed covenant.

During his tour of England in 1870, Keshub spoke of his quest for God and the response he received at that time (1857). Said he:

"English education unsettled my mind, and left a void; I had given up idolatry, but had received no positive system of faith to replace it. I had not a single friend to speak to me of religion, God and immortality. I was passing from idolatry into utter worldliness. Through Divine grace, however, I felt a longing for something higher, the consciousness of sin was awakened within me. And was there no remedy? I looked upward and there was a clear revelation to me. I felt that I had a Heavenly Friend always near to succour me. God Himself told me this; no book, no teacher, but God Himself, in the secret recesses of my heart. God spoke to me in unmistakable language, and gave me the secret of spiritual life, and that was prayer, to which I owed my conversion. I at once composed forms of prayer for every morning and evening, and used them daily, although I was still a member of no Church on earth, and had no clear apprehension of God's character and attributes. I felt profoundly the efficacy of prayer in my own experience. I grew in wisdom, purity and love. But after this I felt the need of the communion of friends. I wanted a real brotherhood on earth. Where was this true Church to be found? I did not know. Well, I established in



my earlier days a small fraternity, in my own house, to which I gave the somewhat singular but significant name of the 'Goodwill Fraternity'. I did not allow myself for one moment to harbour sectarianism, but preached to my friends these two doctrines—God our Father, every man our brother. A small publication of the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj fell into my hands and as I read the chapter on 'what is Brahmaism?' I found that it corresponded exactly with the inner conviction of my heart, the voice of God in the soul. I always felt that every outward book must be subordinated to the teachings of the Inner Spirit—that where God speaks through the Spirit in man all earthly teachers must be silent, and every man must bow down and accept in reverence what God thus revealed in the soul. I at once determined that I would join the Brahmo Samaj". (Lecture in England, 28 April, 1870)

Keshub Chunder believed in Divine guidance. He spoke several times about his inner crisis. In 1857 he felt it. He gave up idolatry, but did not receive any positive system of faith, to replace it. Keshub said:

"In utter helplessness I threw myself at my Father's feet. And at last it pleased Providence to reveal the light of truth to me in a most mysterious manner, and from that time commenced a series of struggles, aspirations, and endeavours which resulted, I am happy to say, in peace, and in conversion of the heart."

But soon came the first trial. Keshub was pressed hard to submit to the customary ceremony of initiation into the orthodox Hindu (Vaishnava) faith. He refused to receive the 'mantra' from the priest of the family and left his home in Colutolla with his wife and took refuge in the Jorasanko palace of Devendranath Tagore (1858) and never returned to the ancestral house.

In 1858 the Government changed hands from the East India Company to the British Crown. In the Declaration of queen



Victoria, the Empress of India, Keshub saw the hand of Providence. Western science, British democracy and justice were sure to unite India into one Nationhood and lead her to achieve independence in right time. Besides that it would bring about the union of the East with the West, which was essential for the peace and progress of the world in modern times.

Keshub Chunder joined service as clerk in the Bank of Bengal—a family preserve in November 1859, continued till June 1861. Then he gave it up and welcomed lifelong poverty, assigning all charges to God. Keshub went on a voyage to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) along with his spiritual mentor, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, his classmate Satyendranath Tagore and Kalikamal Ganguly. This forty-day voyage (Sept. 27 to Nov. 5, 1859) revealed a young devotee with ecstatic love for Nature and God. Keshub acted with Devendranath Tagore as the Joint Secretary of the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj from 25 December 1859.

A new chapter in Keshub's life began from 1860. He had faith in universalism and union of the East with the West. He declared, 'In universalism will be gathered all nations as members of a family, harmonising their individualities'. What did Keshub mean by this union? He said, 'My Church has in it all the elements of European practical life. It encourages education, social reformation, political elevation, the improvement of women, the promotion of cheap journalism, the advancement of science and material prosperity. Like a mighty river, the stream of national devotion comes into my Church from the Vedas and Upanishads, the pantheistic books and mystic scriptures of ancient India. In my Church warm devotion and practical enthusiasm are commingled'. So immediately after joining the Brahmo Samaj he began to introduce new elements that it lacked.

In the Brahmo Samaj the seminary of the 'Tattva Bodhini Sabha' and the worship of one true God were the only activities. Keshub Chunder began to publish monthly 'The

Tracts for the Times' on and from June 1860. We can discover God-fearing man who earnestly prays for Divine Grace.

The following extract will show Keshub's deep yearning for God.

"O lord, my God, to Thee I owe my life and all the pleasures of my life. Thou art the Life of my life—my Father and Friend for ever. Oh monstrous ingratitude! Oh unpardonable disobedience!—Obdurate heart! Hast Thou rebelled against Thy Father? So good, so beneficent, so full of loving kindness!—Without my Father how appalling is this world!.... O tell me, Father, where Thou art, that I may see Thy loving and benignant countenance and pacify my harassed heart. There is none to console me Lord, none to bring peace to me.

I hear a voice in the depths of my heart saying, 'Wail not. The father hath not forsaken you. He forsaketh none of His children, not even the most refractory and wayward. Say not, He is distant from you. Of all things is He the ever nearest to your soul. Open then your eyes, penitent sinner! and see His holy and amiable face. Sorrow shall be no more: suffering shall be at an end'.

— O animating and soothing voice ! My Father has not forsaken me !....

— Fellow-sinners ! contemplate for one moment His boundless mercy; think of His fatherly providence towards you." ('Brethren, Love your Father'; 'The Tracts for the Times', No. 5, October 1860)

But we cannot ignore the First Tract, published in June, 1860, named 'Young Bengal : This is for you'. It was first delivered at the Brahmo Vidyalaya. In this Tract Keshub gave a clarion call to Young Bengal and showed a path towards God. Here extracts from the same are reproduced:



“My dear friend,

I am extremely happy to learn that you have recently abandoned those sceptical notions which you hitherto so obstinately cherished, and which rendered you an object of pity to many of your friends. Intoxicated with your high intellectual attainments you used to speak scoffingly of morality, religion and God, and conduct yourself with an amount of atheistic pride and recklessness awful to conceive. The liberal education you received, instead of ennobling and exalting your mind, degraded and brutalized it. You started from disbelief in idolatry and superstition; but you landed in unbelief and scepticism. You doubted Hinduism; but you brought yourself to doubt religion altogether. Is this the destiny of education,—to foster scepticism and atheism, and instead of harmoniously developing all the powers and sentiments of the soul, and leading them to God, destroy the best and noblest of them, and teach men to wield the weapons of revolt against the All-Holy, his Father and Master?

It is impossible, my friend to calculate the amount of mischief which has been wrought in our country by godless education. Not only has it shed its baneful influence upon the individual but it has proved an effective engine in counteracting the social advancement, the social advancement of the people, and in rendering more frightful the intellectual, domestic and moral destitution of the millions of our countrymen. To the influence of ungodly education, is to be attributed the want of due progress in the social condition of the country....

Already those whom the experience of thirty years has taught any lesson have begun to lose all confidence in our high sounding exhortations, burning speeches, and declamatory tracts and pamphlets, and have learnt to draw a clear line of demarcation between lip patriotism and the country's actual good.....

Evidently, my friend, there is not the heart to work. Alas! the moral nature is asleep: the sense of duty is dead. There is lack of moral courage—want of an active religious principle in our pseudo-patriots. Else why is it that while there is, on the one hand, so much of intelligence and intellectual progress, there is, on the other, so little of practical work for the social advancement of the country? There is a line of demarcation between a mind trained to knowledge and heart trained to faith, piety and moral courage. Rest assured, my friend, that if in our country intellectual progress went hand in hand with religious development, if our educated countrymen had initiated themselves in the living truths of religion, patriotism would not have been mere matter of oration and essay, but a reality in practice; and native society would have grown in health and prosperity....

May that day draw near, my brother, when your goodly example will be followed by others of our educated countrymen; when repenting for their sceptical recklessness, and prayerfully resigning themselves to the guidance of the Holy God they shall be regenerated in faith, when, instead of making knowledge an accursed guide to regions of killing scepticism and worldliness, they shall use it as the bright polestar in the sea of life, and steer the vessel of their soul unto godliness. May wisdom and faith reign in this country in blessed union!

Go on, my dear brother, in the hallowed course which you have begun.... Conduct yourself with wariness and constancy, strength and enthusiasm, but above all with thorough resignation to the Divine will. Steadily and prayerfully look up to Him—our Light and our Strength, our Father and our Friend.”

Keshub Chunder preached before the students of the Brahmo Vidyalaya and presented before them illustrative extracts from the writings of J.D. Morell, T. Wilson, F. J.



Foxton, R.W. Greg, J. Longford, W. Maccall Fox, T. Parker, F.W. Newman, J. Young.

Keshub introduced social service and social reform, education of women and technical education, education of the masses and uplift of the poor. He started the Brahmo Vidyalaya on 24 April, 1859 and the Brahmo Normal School in the same year. While the former was started to teach the essential principles of monotheism, mental and moral philosophy, the latter was training lecturers for the Brahmo Vidyalaya.

Keshub Chunder took steps to harmonise religions and cultures (physical, mental, moral, emotional and spiritual). He introduced a new form of worship in mothertongue, so that regional languages including Hindi might develop and universal spirit might take root quickly. Under his direction and guidance a drama 'Bidhaba Bibaha Natak' (Widow Marriage Play) was enacted on 23 April and 7 May 1859. This is the first use of the stage for social reform. He organised activities in collaboration with Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in aid of widow remarriage and education.

In September 1860 Keshub started 'Sangat Sabha', a society for free discussion of religions and moral subjects and character-building among the nucleus of 'Sadhakas'. The members came from the Brahmo Vidyalaya and the Goodwill Fraternity. They met frequently, and with fiery zeal for self-reformation, laid bare their whole hearts, freely and frankly discussed their own faults, courted mutual aid and criticism, and under Keshub's guidance made most genuine progress in spiritual life. According to P.C. Mozoomdar ('Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder') they sat up the whole night, from the evening to morning twilight in Keshub's room, comparing experiences, practising penitence, making resolutions, offering prayers. In them Keshub Chunder found congenial spirits; he magnetised them, they magnetised him, and together they formed a nucleus of organisation, out of which the best materials of Keshub's subsequent movements were supplied. The discussions of

'Sangat Sabha' were published in the form of booklets and in the magazine 'Dharma Sadhan Patrika' (1872).

Failure of crops in Upper India towards the end of 1860 resulted in a dreadful famine, and prominent men of Calcutta tried to awaken public sympathy with the sufferers. Keshub started social service on a national scale. He organised famine relief for the North-Western Province and malaria relief in Bengal in 1861. Keshub perceived the moral fitness in joining the relief-work.

In May 1861 Keshub went to Krishnagar, a district town of Bengal, on his first missionary tour and defeated Rev. Dyson in a religious controversy upholding Indian heritage. Keshub utilised this visit to propagate by public lectures the religion of Brahmo Samaj.

He published an all-India nationalist fortnightly in English 'Indian Mirror' in August 1861 (which became a daily in 1871), the only contemporary being the 'Hindu Patriot' started by Kristodas Pal.

For some time past Keshub had been in correspondence with prominent Theists in other parts of the world. Notable among them were Professor F.W. Newman and Miss Frances Power Colbe. As a result of Prof. Newman's request for an appeal to the British to enlist its sympathy and support in the cause of education in India, Keshub passed a resolution on education in a special meeting of the Brahmo Samaj (October 3, 1861).

In moving the resolution Keshub Chunder made a speech on the promotion of education in India. The following extracts from the same will prove that even today Keshub's opinion is relevant:

"Perhaps it will be said that the great work of national education belongs to Government and should be left to its hands alone. I would ask,—Is the Government bound to do everything for us? Is it even to bake our bread? We are



bound to acknowledge with fervent gratitude the benefits it has conferred on our country by bringing the light of Western ideas to its shores. Let the Government do what it can and should do; but let us not neglect to do what is peculiarly our own business...

The education which is imparted in Government schools and colleges is of such a nature that while it makes the alumni swallow a deal of facts, fails in establishing in their minds a permanent taste for literary and scientific pursuits. It hurries them through the elaborate routine of a cramming system. A positive taste of study not being procreated or fostered, the habit of study generally terminates with the college career. Where is all that history and geometry, and logic and philosophy which the student so thoroughly mastered? Wrecked perchance in the vortex of *Keraneedom* (clerkship). Secondly: The masses or the people are still immersed in ignorance. What has been done up to this time to educate and improve the people? Nothing. And yet so long as their position is not elevated, India will be but in the infancy of civilization; their prejudices will continue a stumbling-block to progress. It is, therefore, incumbent on us to see that the light of education is extended to the cottage and the mechanic's shop, for every child of God is by birth-right entitled to its benefits. Lastly the degraded condition of our females challenges our serious consideration. No country on earth ever made sufficient progress in civilisation whose females were sunk in ignorance. In fact the actual position of the females is an unfailing index to the social status of the nation to which they belong. If therefore we cherish a desire to elevate India to a fitting place in the scale of nations, we must try to liberate our females from the thralldom of ignorance and superstition."

After a century and a quarter of it, this view holds ground. On the occasion of the thirty-second anniversary of the

foundation of the Brahmo Samaj (23 January 1862) Keshub Chunder brought his wife from her father's house at Bali to the house of Devendranath at Jorasanko to join the celebrations—a bold and unprecedented step considering the custom and ideas of time.

After the usual functions of the day, late in the evening, Devendranath held an extraordinary Divine Service in the inner apartments of his house to which only the nearest relatives were admitted. The prayers of Devendranath and Keshub Chunder were significant, even prophetic. Keshub referred to Devendranath, his wife and daughters as 'father, mother, sisters'.

Here a portion of Keshub's prayer (abridged translation by P.C. Mozoomdar) is produced:-

"Lord of the Universe, encircled by father, mother, sisters and wife. I now behold Thee as the Supreme Father of all. As Mother has Thou ever tended us all in Thy lap, giving us diverse happiness, and protecting us from many evils.

Today we feel blessed by beholding the Giver of Life. The hope that we cherish that the whole world will be united in one family—cannot come to nought. In time different homes will unite in love, and form one undivided family. In the kingdom of One god there can be but one family. Today in Bengal the beginning is made of that consummation."

This prophecy soon became true. The message of Brahmo movement spread like wild fire throughout Bengal and rest of India. Keshub Chunder jumped into the stream of manifold activities and left no stone unturned to spread the message of Brahmoism. For a period of eight years (1862-1870) Keshub Chunder started many a movement, founded many an institution and lectured throughout India.

In 1862 Keshub founded two educational institutions: 'The Calcutta College', the first private college with a distinctive



syllabus of its own (started on 1 March, 1862), and 'The Colutolla Sishu Vidyalaya'. The latter was held every Saturday evening teaching general knowledge and imparting moral training to the children.

About this time the title of *Brahmananda* (rejoicer in God) was conferred on Keshub and he was made *Acharya* of the Brahmo Samaj by Maharshi Devendranath Tagore. Keshub helped in consummation of the first inter-caste marriage in the Brahmo community (August 1862).

In 1863 Keshub Chunder took bold steps towards emancipation of women. First attempt was made for the spiritual emancipation of women. '*Antahpur Upasana*' ('Prayer in the home') was started at Tagore's place at Jorasanko. '*Antahpur Stree Siksha*' was started this year from where female teachers, Indian and European, were sent to individual families for teaching ladies. The '*Bama Bodhini Patrika*' (1863) for ladies was started by Keshub.

In the same year Keshub Chunder founded another organisation, '*Brahmo Bandhu Sabha*'—a society for theistic friends for the propagation of (1) Brahmo Dharma, (2) Tattvajnan, (3) publication of books and (4) imparting education to women at home.

At the Bhavanipur Brahmo Samaj (Calcutta) Keshub Chunder delivered a lecture on 'Social Reformation in India' (February 21, 1863). In this important lecture Keshub dwelt on the plight of the enlightened community of Bengal and analysed how they stood at that time in relation to social reformation and how the influences of education which they received affected the cause of the country. Keshub analysed the character and tendencies of Young Bengal and divided it into four sections—(a) the sceptical, (b) the speculative, (c) the ultra, and (d) the moderate. And consequently he analysed the character of the Brahmo Samaj and identified it with the moderates.

In this valuable speech Keshub dwelt on the important role

played by the Brahmo Samaj and showed the path of emancipation to the younger generation and to the nation at large.

The following extracts from the speech will bear the importance of Keshub's thought:

"The Brahma Samaj, since its establishment by Ram Mohan Roy, chiefly laboured to draw away the Hindu mind from superstitious beliefs and to establish its faith in the truths of theism. Its illustrious founder directed his mind and energy to the propagation among his countrymen of the worship of One True God: hence it is that the early history of the Samaj presents a scene of theological controversy. It has since widened its sphere of action and may be now identified with an institution of varied usefulness, having comprehensive, catholic, and practical objects in view. Whoever glances at the present state of Samaj cannot fail to be impressed with its connection with various movements of reformation,—moral, social, educational and domestic....

To be grateful to God for every temporal blessing is a duty, and carries with it the weight of moral obligation; but the form in which and the accompaniment with which that gratitude is displayed cannot be morally binding but constitute the peculiar province of each man's individual judgement and taste.

Brahmanism holds that only to be obligatory and binding which has the sanction of conscience, all the rest it leaves to the free judgement of every individual. This is grand difference between it and idolatry, which exacts religious conformity even with the non-essential matters of form. These have no connection whatever with religion and should be left to the discretion, taste and convenience of individuals. To issue positive and inviolable decrees in these matters would be to victimise the conscience of the people at the shrine of idolatry. It is now clear, I trust, that



the reformed ceremonies denote essentially the fulfilment of certain domestic and social duties, and carry with them the sanction of religion and morality. But there is another standpoint from which we may observe their moral bearing on society. At the present time, when so many and varied sweeping innovations and revolutions calculated only to destroy prejudices and pernicious usages and customs are in progress around us, any movement for positive reforms must be warmly hailed by all interested in the social and moral welfare of India."

In 1864 Keshub Chunder went on all-India missionary tour in Bombay and Madras. This was the first attempt to knit together the different provinces of India around a programme of moral regeneration. As a result, the Veda Samaj of Madras (1864) and the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay (1867) sprang up. He lectured on "The Duties and Responsibilities of Educated Madrasis" at the Pachaiyappa's School Hall, Madras on Feb 22, 1864 on "The Rise and Progress of the Brahmo Samaj" on March 17, 1864 at the Town Hall, Bombay, on the principles and practices of Brahmo Samaj at the Public Library, Poona on Feb 28, 1864.

Keshub returned to Calcutta from Bombay in April 1864. First inter-caste widow marriage was solemnised by Keshub Chunder on August 2, 1864.

Keshub Chunder was full of activities these years (1864-1867). The "Pratinidhi Sabha", representative assembly for the management of the Brahma Samaj was formed on October 30, 1864 and the Brahma Samaj was reorganised for the whole of India—a seed to the future national Church of India.

The 'Dharmatattva', a Bengali religious organ, at first monthly then a fortnightly, was published in October, 1864. This magazine is still being published as a monthly.

In 1865, the 'Brahmika Samaj', a society conducted by ladies for the promotion of religious culture and technical education

among women was formed. A girls' school was started. Keshub undertook missionary tour to East Bengal, Upper India and the Punjab.

His first Town Hall (Calcutta) lecture on 'Great Men' (September 28, 1866) was attended by all classes of people. This was the first of such annual lectures (1866-1883) used to be delivered by him. He also started his famous weekly "Upasana" (Prayer) every Sunday in the Brahmo Samaj Mandir. Brahmo Mission office was opened (1866). He again undertook Upper India tour (1867). This tour took him to Bhagalpur, Patna, Allahabad, Kanpur, Lahore, Amritsar, Delhi, Monghyr (January to April, 1867).

Under his direct guidance the 'Sloka-Samgraha' (1866-67), a compilation of theistic and moral texts from the scriptures of all great religions, was published. This collection is the backbone of this 'Samaj'.

### ***Foundation of the new Samaj***

In August 1864, there cropped up a difference between Maharshi Devendranath Tagore and his disciple Keshub Chunder. On matters of social reforms widely divergent views were held in the Brahmo Samaj at the time. Keshub was in favour of going ahead. Devendranath was rather conservative. Two issues—appointment in the ministry of two persons who had discarded sacred thread and inter-caste marriage of widows—separated the Brahmos. Devendranath did not obstruct Keshub's instructions, but could not support him wholeheartedly. There was fallout on the issues of social reforms.

"Finding that matters had taken an unfavourable turn, Keshub began to agitate on the propriety of establishing a *Pratinidhi Sabha* (Society of Representatives) to take the opinions of all Brahma Samajis in the provinces on the question of importance. This move raised suspicions and the differences grew wider.... A meeting of the representatives of the Brahma Samajis was held with Devendranath Tagore in the chair (October 30, 1864). The *Pratinidhi*



*Sabha* was formally established with Devendranath and Keshub as President and Secretary respectively.

The differences becoming acute, the management of the Calcutta Brahma Samaj was taken charge of by Devendranath as Trustee of the Samaj property, and the managing committee, with Keshub as Secretary, resigned. Keshub with his band thus parted from Devendranath so far as the secular side of the Samaj was concerned; but in matters spiritual and devotional they continued together for two years more." (Dr. P.S.Básu).

"Keshub published an article in the *Indian Mirror* on 'The Brahma Samaj or Theism in India'. (July 1, 1865) in which was traced the development of samaj to the life and labours of Ram Mohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore. It contained an intelligent appreciation and grateful recognition of the contributions of either of the leaders.

The same day a letter signed by Keshub and some members of his group was addressed to the Trustee and the President, Devendranath Tagore, suggesting some changes in the conduct of affairs of the Samaj, and, in case the suggestions were not acceptable, seeking his advice on the starting of a separate Brahma organisation.

Devendranath in reply stated his inability to accept suggestions and consented to separation." (Dr. P.S.Basu)

The date was July 6, 1865.

On the occasion of thirty-sixth anniversary of the Brahma Samaj, there was special Divine Service for the ladies of the *Bramica Samaj* (January 23, 1866) , conducted by Devendranath Tagore; and at the common service Keshub preached a sermon on *Viveka O Vairagya* (conscience and renunciation) which was the last he preached in that Prayer Hall. Keshub said: "The true worship of the Infinite consists in Yoga or spiritual communion. *Viveka* and *Vairagya* are the two means whereby this communion is attained. *Viveka* leads us from untruth unto truth; *Vairagya* from depth unto life eternal."

In response to a requisition from a large number of Brahmas a meeting was held on November 11, 1866, its object being stated by Keshub thus: "Our present object is simply organise and incorporate the Brahma Community to establish such enduring bonds of sympathy and union among the several members of our community as are essential to their individual and common welfare, to the consolidation and growth of our Church, and to effectual propagation of Brahma Dharma (Theism)".

By the first resolution the Brahmo Samaj of India was established (November 11, 1866). The last resolution was for presenting an Address to Devendranath Tagore.

"The separation from the parent Samaj was followed by a great mental depression in Keshub and his associates.... Keshub sought Divine sympathy. About the middle of August 1867, he began to hold Divine services in his house with intimate followers, with unforeseen beneficial results. The tone of their religious life underwent a complete change. Sweet and tender emotions filled their hearts; hope and joy revived. Their devotions took on Vaishnava spirits." (Dr. P.S.Basu). Vaishnava *Sankirtans* with Vaishnava instruments of music (*Khole, Karatal, ektara*) were introduced. Thus began a new chapter of *Bhakti* in Keshub's life.

### ***Keshub Chunder Sen : A Missionary***

Keshub Chunder was inspired by one dominant motif—'The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man'. He devoted himself for this noble cause.

He undertook all India tour from 1864 through 1880. Within these years about 100 branches of the Samaj were opened throughout India.

Keshub Chunder worked incessantly and fought like a crusader for the cause of Truth during the last seventeen years of his life (1867-1883). He started seven more journals,



published a number of booklets, founded a few institutions, introduced training schemes for the upliftment of the poor and the downtrodden females, organised movement to eradicate social evils, toured throughout the country and addressed scores of congregations.

In 1867, 'Brahma Vidyalaya' was revived. First social gathering of ladies was held as a result of which ladies started taking part in public functions. Ragged School for the poor and destitute was started in memory of Miss Mary Carpenter who worked hard for the upliftment of the poor. '*Dainik Upasana*'—the new form of Upasana (divine worship) was started on and from August 16, 1867.

The order of the Divine Service came gradually to be altered from the form given by Devendranath.

"(1) The Service now comprised four distinct items—(a) *Udbodhana*, invocation or awakening the soul to worship; (b) *Aradhana*, adoration of the Deity; (c) *Dhyana*, silent communion, followed by reading of scriptures and an exhortation or sermon; (d) *Prarthana*, prayer or supplication. Hymns came at the beginning, in between, and at the end.

(2) *Adoration*, the second item, was now addressed to the Deity in second person, in place of a sort of homily on the benign attributes of God who was hitherto referred to in the third person.

(3) The words *Shuddham apaviddham* expressing the holiness of the Deity were added to the rest of the *mantra* (basic formula) of the Service, indicating that the worshippers were keenly alive to a sense of sin and shortcoming in themselves." (Dr. P.S.Basu)

The *Bhakti* movement was also started. '*Kirtan*' was introduced in the first 'Brahmo Utsav' (November 11, 1867). '*Nagar Sankirtan*' was started on January 24, 1868 and the foundation stone of the new Brahmo *Mandir* (house of worship). This *Mandir* (now 95, Keshub Sen Street, Calcutta) was consecrated



in 1869. Weekly Divine Service was started at the *Mandir* in 1870; monotheistic '*Upasana*' (worship) without distinction of caste, creed, sex or colour began. This new form of Service was conducted in Bengali,—a great contribution to the spiritual history of India.

Keshub Chunder addressed congregations in 1868 in Northern India among which mention may be made of the following: (a) address on 'Bhakti' and Sri Chaitanya at Santipur, the centre of Bengal Vaishnavism (February), (b) sermon on 'Faith' at the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay (March 19), and on 'Prayer' at the same platform (March 26), (c) sermon on 'Love of God and Love of man' at Bhagalpur (February 22), (d) sermon on 'No one can serve two masters' at Monghyr (March 1), (e) sermon on 'Faith and Purity' at Patna (March 7), (f) sermon on 'Knowledge and Faith' at Allahabad (March 10), (g) lecture on 'Love of Truth' at Jabbalpore (March 14).

Since the institution of daily worship by Keshub in August 1867, followed by the celebration of Brahmotsav in November, the emotional and joyous side of the religious life of his little band was steadily growing throughout India. Keshub's divine services and sermons attracted devotees in large numbers and congregations steadily increased. A wave of devotion swept throughout North and East India and Keshub was worshipped as an 'Avatar'.

After a triumphal tour of Northern India Keshub Chunder returned to Calcutta (July 1868) and attended to affairs concerning Brahma marriages. Since the consummation of the first marriage according to Brahmic rites in 1861, the leaders had a secret uneasiness regarding the legality of such marriages. The Advocate General of Bengal, on being referred to, opined in 1867 that they had not the sanction of the law of the land. The Brahma Samaj of India at its meeting of October 20, 1867, had already considered the question. The issue was thoroughly discussed in July 1868, and it was decided to take steps to move the government to legalise Brahma marriages. In response to

the invitation of the Governor General Sir John Lawrence, Keshub visited Simla in August 1868 and discussed the issue with government officials. The Native Marriage Act (Act III of 1872) was passed on March 19, 1872 as a result of Keshub's untiring and extensive efforts for eight years.

After a seven-month tour to England (March to September 1870), Keshub Chunder Sen came back to India and founded the Indian Reform Association (November 11, 1870) for the social and moral reformation of Indians with the following sections—(1) Female Improvement, (2) Education of the Working Classes and Technical Education, (3) Literature at a Cheap Price, (4) Temperance, (5) Charity.

He started the first Bengali pice-organ for the masses—the 'Sulabh Samachar' (November 16, 1870). It was a popular weekly with editions in Hindi and Gujarati. It published articles, mostly from Keshub himself in simple and chaste Bengali, on religious, moral, social and political topics, besides general and technical information.

Keshub co-operated to promote the 'Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science' sponsored by Dr. Mohendra Lal Sarcar (1871). He founded an 'Industrial School' and a 'Working Men's Institution' (Night School) in 1871. He organized Fever Epidemic Relief in Behala, near Calcutta, in 1872. The Charity Section of the Indian Reforms Association arranged for medical aid.

From Dr. P.S. Basu's account we have the following information on Female Improvement and Temperance:

"In connection with the Female Improvement Section an Adult School was immediately started and placed under Miss Pigot, formerly of the Bethune School. The Native Ladies' Normal School, to train teachers, was established on February 1, 1871, and a practising Girls' School was added in September. The ladies of the Normal School started (April 14) the *Vama Hitaishini Sabha* (women's



welfare society), where papers were read and discussed by them. Most of these papers were published in the *Vama-bodhini Patrika* (journal for women), which had been in existence since 1862.

The Temperance Section, with the valued co-operation of Paery Charan Sarkar, Headmaster of the Hare School, who had already been doing pioneer work in this direction, published pamphlets, and organised meetings and lectures, attended by workingmen in large numbers, the earliest of such being at Baranagore, where a paper in Bengali on "the Evils of Drunkenness" was read. A temperance monthly paper in Bengali, entitled *Mada na Garal* (wine or poison) was started and distributed freely from next year (1872)."

Keshub Chunder Sen founded the *Bharat Asram* (February 5, 1872). This was the first endeavour for nation-building for the cultivation of spiritual fellowship by community living.

Amidst the activities of the Indian Reform Association, Keshub did not forget the need of building up model family life and the new community life.

"Throughout the year 1871, Keshub systematically inculcated and insisted upon the supreme importance of the unity and love among advanced Brahmas. He taught the doctrine of an apostolic brotherhood and sisterhood, a kind of spiritual commonwealth in which all advantages, both temporal and religious, were to be held without distinction. Unforeseen facilities to develop this deal into an experiment presented themselves. A number of Brahmo missionaries had, during his absence, taken up residence with families in the old three-storied house, now pulled down, at No. 13 Mirzapur Street, where the 'Indian Mirror' office and the 'Indian Mirror' Press had also been removed. When Keshub returned home, he found these families congregated together, and the house, being spacious, other families (non-missionaries) were soon invited to live there. Taking this for his nucleus, Keshub



established in February 1872, the institution known as the 'Bharat Asram'." (P.C. Mozoomdar).

Keshub and his friends with their families were first to enter the Belghoria gardenhouse to form the 'Bharat Asram'. The name 'Bharat Asram' was coined by Keshub. It expressed his idea of the new way of life. 'Bharat' stood for geographical, ethnical and socio-religious character. 'Asram' meant a shelter for living together in communion with God, along with all-round self-culture, carrying out household duties in modern way. The ideas of co-operative projects and community purse were put into practice. Keshub selected this site (Belghoria)—a quiet, refreshing gardenhouse in a village with natural surroundings, instead of the distracting atmosphere of the city. He believed that in order to transform the character of those who joined the new movement, they required a complete change of environment.

From early youth two ideas were dominant in Keshub's life and thought: the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, preached in the Goodwill Fraternity of 1857. The first was realised in the Theistic congregational worship. The second was taking shape through the *sangat sabha* of 1860, the Mission Office of 1866, and now through the Bharat Asram (1872).

This last "was a useful, delighted institution. Its influences have changed and elevated the careers of many Brahmo families. Its memories, its friendships are undying in their sweetness and sacredness to many souls. The lessons of devotional and apostolical life learnt there have influenced the whole subsequent life of some of the inmates".

The year 1872 is an important one in the career of Keshub Chunder Sen, founder of the Brahmo Samaj of India. "It was marked by the fruition of the practical and devotional projects he had been developing since the time of his separation from the Adi Brahmo Samaj six years before. There was varied and vigorous practical work, as well as fervent and truthful spiritual endeavour. Keshub's own horizon widened, his associates'

enthusiasm redoubled. At the same time disconcerting features were not altogether absent. Forces were gathering for the second schism that was to come six years later." (Dr. P.S. Basu)

The Brahmo Vidyalaya was revived and the Albert College was started in 1872. Keshub went on a missionary tour to the North-West Province of India (now in Pakistan) in 1872.

The 'Sunday edition Indian Mirror', a weekly was started on June 29, 1873. 'Brahmo Niketan', a Students' Home was started on September 16, 1873. The 'Society for Suppression of Public Obscenity in India' was inaugurated at Town Hall, Calcutta, on September 20, 1873. The 'Tapoban' at Belghoria was opened for spiritual exercises in recluse, harmonising *Yoga*, *Bhakti*, *Jnana* and *Seva*, in 1874.

The 'Bharat Asram' (1872-1877) became an abode of joy. Caste distinction, polygamy, intemperance, idolatry, irreligiousness, sectarianism, superstitious practices and unruly conduct were shunned in the Asram-life. In that period the contribution of Bharat Asram in moulding the social life of new Bengal was without a parallel.

The Bharat Asram, though wound up in 1877 after a life of five years, had left a deep imprint on the minds of Brahmos. The new community symbolised the future Indian society that was to grow, assimilating the best of ancient Indian culture and modernity, integrating Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi communities into a new way of life.

The importance of the Bharat Asram can be measured if we place it on the background of Brahmo Samaj and Keshub's life-long preaching of the doctrine on apostolic-brotherhood and sisterhood.

The period between 1857-1871 was preparatory to the community life of the Brahmo Samaj. Its first phase was *Sangater Niti*, i.e. moral awareness. The second phase was *Monghyrer Bhakti*, i.e. loving devotion, as different from cold devotion. The third phase was the period of the '*Bharat*



*Asram*' (1872-1877), i.e., for the building of community life. Seeds of the new community life were sown in the 'Bharat Asram' and there was a rich harvest. In 'Asram' the inmates learnt how to live together and how to change one's self to be fit to live together. The Asram changed their way of life. *Zennana* was abolished. Men and women learnt to mix and live together freely, in a dignified and ethical manner. Having their daily devotion, studies, meals, and activities together, showing their noblest dispositions of love and goodwill towards each other. In the 'Atmajibani' (autobiography) of Sudakshina Sen and the 'Autobiography of an Indian Princess' by Suniti Devi, daughter of Keshub, who were inmates of the *Bharat Asram* and by *Sadhan Kanan*, we find descriptions of life. These accounts show how the way of life of inmates were changed.

Swami Dayanand Sarasvati of Gujarat came down to Calcutta in the middle of December, 1873. Keshub came in contact with him and was much gratified by the conversation which was carried on in Sanskrit by Swamiji and in Hindi by Keshub. A deep feeling of mutual esteem and affection, which never waned, grew up between the two. Dayanand visited Keshub at his house. Keshub by extensive notices and invitations turned the occasion into a numerously attended public meeting. At the instance of Keshub, Swamiji took to speaking in Hindi so that it could be understood by the common people. He was a gymnosophist. At Keshub's request he covered his body. Thus the spread of Vedic theism in Hindi-speaking areas were effected.

The forty-fourth Maghotsav was held in the second half of January 1875. Keshub Chunder delivered his anniversary lecture at the Town Hall, Calcutta on January 23, 1875.

This lecture 'Behold the light of Heaven of India' marks a new epoch in his movement. At that time (1874-1875) Keshub was suffering both in body and mind. A change of air and surroundings was felt necessary. Leaving behind indiscipline in the Bharat Asram and malicious propaganda about it by



interested parties, Keshub went to Hazaribagh, Bihar, for three weeks (August 1874). He wrote a Bengali booklet "*Sukhi Parivar*" (Happy Family) at Hazaribagh. On his return to Calcutta, at a weekly meeting of the Missionary Conference, he declared that institutions could no longer be regarded as fulfilling their true purpose and expressing his ideal, which could now be gathered from that booklet. On the requisition of a large number of Brahmosees a meeting of the Brahmo Samaj of India was held on September 19, 1874 and the congregation was reorganised. Keshub was living a somewhat austere life at the Belghoria *Tapovan* (the Retreat). At that time he was unhappy over the way of life led by Brahmosees. He "observed symptoms of approaching worldliness creep into the movement. Higher planes of spiritual and moral excellence had to be attained." ('Indian Mirror'). Towards the end of November 1874, Keshub went on a missionary tour to upper and central India. He came back after a month, but noticed that the discord among missionaries did not show any sign of abating. He felt the time had come for himself and the Brahmo missionaries to practise asceticism, and accept strict discipline for the sake of purity and spiritual life.

The famous anniversary lecture of January 23, 1875 should be viewed in this background. A few portions are quoted here:

"Behold that heavenly light in the midst of India! How it ascends, extends, and expands from day to day. It is the light of new dispensation vouchsafed by providence for India's salvation. And do you hear that sound like the rushing of many waters? It is the voice of the Lord. It is His word containing the message of life everlasting to the millions of this land... Whether we look at the mighty political changes which the British Government has set in motion, or we analyze those deep national movements of social and moral reform which are being carried on by native reformers and patriots, we cannot but feel that this long series of events constitute one vast dispensation, and are only different parts of that gigantic plan of redemption

whereby God Almighty has chosen to save India.....

What I accept as the New Dispensation in India neither shuts out God's light from the rest of the world, nor does it run counter to any of those marvellous dispensations of His mercy which were made in ancient times. Surely India needs a special dispensation to save her. God alone knows how to save India. Not man but God kindled that spirit of reform which like wild fire spreads today from province to province among the diverse races and tribes that inhabit the country....

In that sublime utterance of Heaven, 'I Am', you have recognised your God and Saviour, and the essence of living faith. You have only to add another equally short gospel to complete the creed of salvation. I mean the gospel of LOVE. In it lies in a concentrated form the whole doctrine of our duties to God and man. He that hath Love hath God in him.... If ye love God with true love, and if ye love all men with true love, ye shall be served. This is ancient and universal religion, and in this lies abridged the whole creed of human redemption.... The loving devotee surrenders himself to God, and lives in Him. He dwells in God, and God dwells in him.... That loving communion which makes man one with God is the chief feature of the new dispensation granted unto us.... We must love man also, for it is by loving God and man with the whole soul that the gospel of salvation is fulfilled." (January 23, 1875).

Within two months of this memorable lecture another important event took place in Keshub's life. In the second half of March, Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Deva came to the *Tapovan* (Belghoria) to see Keshub. He was then unknown to fame. Keshub and his friends had not so much as heard his name. Discourses by Paramhansa were so profound and beautiful that it united him with Keshub and his followers in intimate friendship. Keshub with his catholic approach arranged gatherings for him to talk about spiritual Hinduism in



his unique style, understandable to the common people. At the request of Keshub he too covered his body and dropped the use of quaint words.

“This meeting of Keshub and Ramakrishna was eminently fruitful. Each recognised the work of the other. They became bound to each other in a permanent tie of mutual regard and affection. The spiritual life of both deepened and their already catholic outlook widened. Keshub introduced the other to the world at large, and thereby the beneficent influence of this saintly life, with its purity and humanity, had the opportunity of bearing fruit.” (P.S. Basu).

In 1876 ‘*Brahmo-gitopanisad*’ was published. It is a book which imparts missionary life’s teaching, harmonising Yoga, Bhakti, Karma and Jnana. In conformity to Keshub’s original profession of finding a religion of life he had gradually introduced certain rigid forms and classifications of religious conduct, which segregated the community into devotees and ordinary worshippers. He initiated the fourfold classification of devotees into the disciplines of *Yoga*, *Bhakti*, *Karma* and *Jnana*. In ‘*Brahmo-gitopanisad*’ we get the clear classification and necessary instructions.

The ‘Albert Institution’ was founded by Keshub on April 22, 1876 for the promotion of literacy, political and social intercourse among all classes of people. The ‘Sadhan-Kanan’ at Konnagar-Rishra was founded on May 20, 1876 to live a monastic life and practise Yoga in retirement.

Keshub Chunder toured Northern India at the fag end of 1876 and attended the Delhi Durbar, held on December 31.

He presided over the meeting organised by Surendranath Banerjee under the Indian Association to protest against the Government of India’s reduction of the maximum age of appearing at the Indian Civil Service Examination (May 24, 1877). This was his first political meeting.



Keshub purchased a residential house on November 12, 1877—'Lily Cottage'—situated opposite to Sealdah Station, Calcutta. This was renamed 'Kamal Kutir' which became his headquarters. He founded in 1883 the 'Victoria College for Women' for higher education of girls. It is situated within the campus of his headquarters. On January 24, 1878 'Albert Band of Hope' was organised by Keshub.

Now we come to the final period of Keshub's life. It spreads from 1878 to 1884. The principal events of this period are—the Coochbehar marriage, division of the Brahmo Samaj of India, declaration of Nava-Vidhan, publication of Keshub's spiritual autobiography, and finally his death.

In 1878 the famous Coochbehar marriage was settled. Keshub married his eldest daughter Suniti Devi to the young Prince of Coochbehar on October 20, 1880.

"About the middle of 1877 Keshub had unexpectedly received from the British Government a proposal to give his daughter Suniti Devi in marriage to Nripendra Narayan Bhup, the minor Prince and future Ruler of Coochbehar. Keshub had declined to entertain it. After some time the proposal was repeated with vehemence. Keshub consulted, as was his habit on all important occasions, his unfailing inward Monitor, and felt he received approval. Whilst he was in the midst of the Maghotsav, an agent of the Government arrived to settle matters of detail in connection with the marriage, which must take place before the Prince left for England, where he was soon proceeding for purposes of education. As neither the bride nor the bridegroom were of the proper age, Keshub insisted that the ceremony was to be only a formal betrothal, and that essentially Brahmo (which were only non-idolatrous Hindu) rites should be observed. All this was agreed to. The ceremony did not pass off quite smoothly, for, on behalf of the Ranis of the Palace there was effort to introduce into it orthodox Hindu rites, which Keshub stubbornly resisted. In the end the agreed form was gone through, though in a few minor

matters there was some compromise (March 6, 1878).” (Dr. P.S. Basu).

Then came the division of the Brahmo Samaj in the wake of a violent agitation which sprang up from the Coochbehar marriage.

“The party in the Brahmo Samaj not well-disposed towards Keshub and wishing to see the downfall of his influence, took all advantage of the occasion and set up a violent agitation against him, accusing him of having acted against Brahmic principles. Keshub himself remained remarkably cool and collected. His friends and opponents divided themselves into two hostile camps.... It all resulted in the second schism of the Brahmo Samaj, for which the ground was prepared for the last six years. The protestors held a public meeting in the Town Hall and established a separate organisation under the name of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj (May 15, 1878).” (Dr. P.S. Basu)

Immediately after his betrothal to Suniti Devi, Keshub's daughter, Prince Nripendra Narayan Bhup had proceeded to England, from where he returned in February, 1879. When both the bride and the bridegroom were of age, their marriage was duly consummated in the Brahmo Mandir in the presence of close friends and relatives (October 20, 1880).

The protestors were led by Shivanath Shastry and Anandomohan Basu who became leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. It may be remembered here that this marriage ultimately led to social, educational and administrative reforms in the princely state of Coochbehar and introduced modernism in the feudal state. In course of time, Coochbehar became the second cultural capital of Bengal under the patronage of Brahmananda Keshub Chunder Sen and Rabindranath Tagore.

The fiftieth Maghotsav (January 1880) did not show any trace of the effect of the violent agitations and upheavals of the past few years. There was no sign of doubt or despondency in the



Brahmo Samaj of India. The various functions of the occasion were marked by much gladness and fervour. Keshub's anniversary lecture in the Town Hall (January 24, 1880) was on "God-Vision in the Nineteenth Century". This lecture on God-vision was a prelude to what came the next day—12th Magh (January 25, 1880). It was the formal declaration of NAVA-VIDHAN, the new dispensation, through the inspiring and impassioned sermon on "The Birth of the New Child".

New dispensation meant the harmony of religions. The God of Harmony could be realized only through realizing the harmony of spirit subsisting among the saints and prophets of the world.

"Living God fulfilled His great purposes, unseen and unobserved and evolved His eternal doctrines beneath the evanescent and unimportant phenomena and party bickerings and sectarian conflicts". ('The Birth of the New Child')

Thus Keshub Chunder Sen reached the apex of his spiritual life and declared the Religion of Harmony as the New Dispensation which declares—"We believe in Church Universal, which is the repository of all ancient wisdom and the receptacle of all modern sciences, which recognizes in all prophets and saints a harmony, in all scriptures a unity and through all dispensations a continuity which abjures all that separates and divides, and always magnifies unity and peace, which harmonizes reason and faith, Yoga and Bhakti, asceticism and social duty in their highest forms, and which shall make of all nations and sects one kingdom and one family in the fullness of time". (Nava-Samhita)

Keshub reached the pinnacle of glory and became very busy with his mission. Failing health could not detract him from his goal. After declaring 'Navavidhan' or 'New Dispensation' on January 26, 1880, Keshub started a Bengali weekly 'Nava-vidhan' and an English weekly 'Sunday Mirror' and founded the 'Brahmo Tract Society'—publishing agency in April, 1880.



On January 28, 1881 Keshub held 'Sree Durbar' or the 'Apostles' Durbar' to govern the spiritual affairs of his Church. The missionaries were divided into groups charged with different duties. An Order of Lay Missionaries was instituted, composed of devout Brahmos living in different cities of India. Among others Dewan Navalrai S. Advani of Hyderabad, Sind, Lala Ralla Ram and Lala Kashi Ram of the Punjab, and Mr. Gopal Swami Iyer of Bangalore, became lay missionaries. Two days later different provinces were allotted to individual or group of missionaries as their special field of work.

The Apostles' Durbar resolved to publish an English weekly organ named 'The New Dispensation', the first number of which came out on March 24, 1881. It was entirely written by Keshub so long as he was physically fit to do so.

A new form of 'Maghotsav' was introduced in January 1881. A weekly in English named 'The Liberal' was published in 1882. 'The New Samhita' or 'The New Laws of Life for the Aryans of India' was promulgated by Keshub Chunder in 1883. New books were published by him, viz., 'Brahma Sangeet O Samkirtan', 'Nava Vrindaban Natak', 'Brahmo Gitopanisad', 'Sadhu Samagame', 'Sebaker Nivedan', 'Samanvaya', 'Bhashya Mala', 'Yoga : Objective and Subjective'.

'The Lily Cottage' was consecrated on January 21, 1879. 'The New Sanctuary'—'Nava Devalaya' was consecrated on January 1, 1884.

Keshub drew a number of luminaries. A good number of people were inspired with the spirit of religious harmony and served the New Dispensation. The 'Bharatavarshiya Brahmo Mandir' (built in 1868-69) became the centre of all the activities in the last phase of Keshub Chunder's life. We can only mention the names of those who joined Keshub from the very start and dedicated their lives: Pundits Bijoy Krishna Goswami, Aughore Nath Gupta, Gour Govindo Roy, Babus Mahendra Nath Bose, Prasanna Kumar Sen, Dina Nath Mazumdar, Bungo Chandra Roy were missionaries and Babus Umesh

Chandra Dutta, Editor of 'Bamabodhini Patrika' (1863) and Kshetra Mohan Dutta, educationist, were non-missionaries. Eminent persons like Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra, Babu Krishtodas Pal, Pandit Mahes Chandra Vidyaratna, Father Lafont, Dr. Mohendra Lal Sircar, Poet Hem Chandra Bandyopadhyay and Babu Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, path-finder of modern Indian literature, were his admirers.

Keshub passed through hectic activities in the last years of his life. Though his health was gradually falling he did not spare himself.

“During the anniversary celebrations of Nava-vidhan in May 1882, Keshub had become indisposed. On the day of the annual oration, just after it, he had fits of faintness. This was indeed the beginning of his last illness. Medical treatment was not of much avail. His colleagues shared his work, and the leisure thus found he employed to make the projected theatre ('Nava Vrindavan Natak') a success. As the hot season advanced he became worse, and was sent to the hill-station Darjeeling for a change (June 4, 1882). Not benefitting by it, he returned soon to Calcutta.” (Dr. P.S. Basu)

Within a fortnight of his return from Darjeeling (July 1882) Keshub began to deliver from the pulpit on Sundays a series of sixteen discourses intended to lay bare the deepest springs of his life and conduct (from July 23 through December 31, 1882). These were delivered in Bengali (later on translated into English). These he issued under the title of 'JEEVAN VEDA' (1883). This book can be called the spiritual autobiography of Keshub Chunder Sen. The headings of these sixteen sermons will indicate the character and vision of Keshub Chunder. They are: (1) Prayer, (2) Sense of Sin, (3) Baptism of Fire: Enthusiasm, (4) Solitude and Detachment, (5) Independence, (6) Conscience, (7) The Influx of Bhakti, (8) Shyness and Timidity, (9) The Accession of Yoga, (10) The Marvellous Calculus, (11) Triumph, (12) Division and Integration,



(13) Triune Nature, (14) My Caste Ascertained, (15) Learner Spirit, (16) Refutation of Untruth.

On the New Year's Day (1883) Keshub sent forth the famous "Epistle" written by him and addressed to the world at large—an appeal on behalf of 'New Dispensation'. This appeal ended with the clarion call to all—

"Beloved brethren, accept our love and give us yours, and let the east and the west with one heart celebrate the jubilee of the New Dispensation.

Let Asia, Europe, Africa, and America with diverse instruments praise the New Dispensation and sing the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man."

The editors of the principal newspapers of the world were requested to print the *Epistle*. It had a fairly good publicity and met with varied reception.

Keshub became seriously ill. On January 1, 1884 'Nava Devalaya'—the new sanctuary at the Lily Cottage was consecrated. Keshub offered his last public prayer on that occasion. On that morning Keshub Chunder was so ill that he could not get up from his bed. Indeed physicians and friends were greatly upset when against their remonstrances Keshub got himself carried down from his bed-room upstairs to the sanctuary. He spoke so lowly that he could be heard only by those who were quite close to the pulpit. This was his last prayer. He adored Mother Divine, prayed for her mercy and asked the assembled devotees to accept that infinitely loving Mother (i.e, his Church). That same afternoon he became critically ill, and as the week passed all hope of recovery was abandoned. Brahmananda Keshub Chunder Sen breathed his last in the morning of January 8, 1884. Thus ended a life dedicated to the service of God.

### ***Voyage to England***

Keshub Chunder was in correspondence with the British



Theists from 1861. Some of them had invited him to Europe. He kept it in his mind for a long time. In a brief note in the 'Indian Mirror' (August 13, 1869) Keshub had expressed his intention of a visit to England. The leaders of the Unitarian Church in England gave him an invitation. Finally, Keshub left for England with Prasanto Kumar Sen, a devoted friend of him sailed in the P & O Steamship 'Multan' from Calcutta on February 15, 1870, disembarked at Suez on March 10 and resumed the voyage by the P & O Steamship 'Bangalore' from Alexandria and arrived at Marseilles on March 19. He took train from that port, crossed the English Channel and arrived at London on March 21. He called on Miss Sophia Dobson Collet, Lord Lawrence, Miss Frances Power Cobbe, Her Majesty the Queen of Holland (who was then in England), Her Majesty the Queen Victoria and a host of other luminaries.

Keshub Chunder was in England for seven months, lectured in seventy congregations, and preached the message of love and brotherhood. He was heard by over forty thousand people who came from different levels of the society in England. He came back to India in September, 1870.

"Never again has England heard from the East a voice like that of Keshub Chunder Sen", so said the eminent scholar J. Estlin Carpenter in 1907, and again in 1926, "Here was a voice of rare power, eloquence, and charm. His dignified presence in the fullness of his manhood, the glow of faith in his face, his courage, his passionate sincerity, his conviction of the reality of the presence of God, all made a deep impression.... When he bade England farewell he left behind in many hearts a clearer vision of the supporting power of the Everlasting Love".

He spoke on Indian reforms, duties of England to India, temperance education in its various aspects, spiritual fellowship of humanity and social and religious freedom of men, and Britain's responsibility in India, Britain's stewardship of India and peace problem, colour bar and excise policy.

As a result of Keshub Chunder Sen's visit many Englishmen

were enlightened about the actual state in India, various associations were started for establishing spiritual and cultural fellowship with India and for education of Indians, specially women.

Keshub Chunder was consulted by Sir Fredric Currie on March 29, by the Duke of Argyll on April 10 and by Sir Erskine Perry, the President of the Political Committee of the Secretary of State's Council on May 4, acting on the advice of Lord Mayo, the Governor General of India. The result was famous Argyll's despatch on mass education cess of May 15, 1870.

Keshub was very busy in England. From March to September he met a good number of ladies and gentlemen of the English society and apprised them of the situation in India and of the aims of his new Church.

The Dean of Westminster invited Keshub to lunch when he was introduced to Lady Augusta Stanley, Prince Christian and Professor Max Mueller on April 1. The Professor introduced "Indian subjects, the Vedas specially, in the course of conversation and discussion." The next few days were spent in attending service at St. James Church where Dr. Lidden preached one of his Lenten lectures, and seeing the places of interest. Keshub preached at Dr. Martineau's Chapel at Little Portland Street, London on March 10. It drew a large congregation which included members of both Houses of Parliament and several eminent scientific and literary men. Then Keshub met the leader of English thought—Mr. John Stuart Mill. Both admired each other. The same evening the British and Foreign Unitarian Association arranged a great gathering at the Hanover Square rooms to welcome Keshub (April 12, 1870). The Dean of Westminster, Dr. Arthur Penhryn Stanley, in moving the resolution of welcome, referred to the great national sanctuary committed to his care, "in which the enmities of twenty generations lie buried and forgiven." On May 18, Keshub attended the Lord Mayor's dinner. At an evening party he met the great Orientalist Mr. Goldstucker, "who is a funny old man,



and looks very much like a *Bhattacharjee* (Brahmin Priest)". Keshub had a breakfast with Mr. Gladstone. He wrote in his diary—"There are some illustrious personages...the celebrated Mr. Dickens. He lectured on Sunday morning gatherings at different chapels, e.g., Stamford Street Chapel on "The Book of Life", at Rosely Hill Chapel on "Take no Thought for your Life". He also spoke at the Annual Session of the Congregational Union of England and Wales on "The Path of Universal Fellowship" and at the Peace Society's annual meeting on "The Tenets of Indian Religious Life."

Among his speeches delivered in England, the most important is the speech delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington Butts on "England's Duties to India" on May 24, 1870. Keshub said:

"If you turn your eyes for a moment to yonder East, you will see a great country, rising from the death-like slumber of ages, and exerting its best powers to move onward in the path of true enlightenment and reform. That country is India. The light of truth has dawned over the hundred and eighty millions of its people. Undoubtedly it is mainly owing to the British energy and British enterprise, and the exertions of that paternal Government under whose care Providence, in its inscrutable mercy, has placed my country".

Keshub dwelt on his role as a representative of India:

"In my first public address I said that I had come to this country as an inquirer and learner, in order to study its various phases of character, thought, feeling and action. This evening I stand upon this platform, not merely as a learner, but as a representative of my country, as an humble advocate of its interests. I hope and trust that the few suggestions I have to offer for your consideration, will be carried by you into your own meetings, and into your homes, in order that you may think over them seriously,



and take prompt action.... I stand on the platform as one who desires to represent the wants and wishes of all sections of the Indian community, so far as it is computible with a sense of duty and conscience.... If you desire to do good to India as a whole, you must look to all the numerous sections of its varied community, and try as far as possible to do justice to the whole nation. It is my firm conviction that you Englishmen stand there in India merely as trustees. You have no right to say that you will use its property, its riches, or its resources, or any of the privileges which God has given you, simply for the purpose of your own selfish aggrandizement and enjoyment. You are accountable to God for those millions of souls that have been placed in your hands as a sacred trust. You cannot hold India for the interest of Manchester; nor for the welfare of any other section of the community here, nor for the advantage of those merchants who go there and live as birds of passages for a time, and never feel an abiding interest in the country, because they really cannot do so. If you desire to hold India, you can only do so for the good and welfare of India.”

Keshub dwelt upon the problems of India and pointed the duties of England towards India. Then he cited those problems: promotion of education far and wide, national education, school education, higher education, female education, problems arising out of the Permanent Settlement; the question of enhancement of school rates; creation of jobs for the educated; abolition of State Scholarship; social reforms aiming towards the upliftment of downtrodden women; problem of liquor traffic, ill-treatment of poor by the nominal Christians who went down to India.

Keshub asked his audience and the British authorities to do their duty towards India. Finally he declared:

“Those days are gone never to return when men thought of holding India at the point of bayonet. If England seeks to crush down two hundred millions of people in this glorious

country, to destroy their nationality, to extinguish the fire of noble antiquity and the thrill of ancient Patriotism, and if England's object of governing the people of India is simply to make money, then I say, perish British rule this moment".

The other famous lectures delivered by Keshub Chunder in England are: 'The Living God' (April 10), 'The Book of Life' (April 28), 'The Path of Universal Fellowship' (May 10), 'Christ and Christianity' (May 28), 'Temperance' (May 29), 'Hindu Theism' (June 7), 'Religious and Social Liberty' (June 9), 'Regeneration of the Heart' (June 26), 'Women in India' (August 1), 'Divine Unity' (September 4), 'Speech at Farewell Soiree' (Sept. 12).

Keshub Chunder had an opportunity to meet Her Majesty the Queen Victoria at Osborne on August 13, 1870. The conversation was on topics relating to India. The meeting was very pleasant. Her Majesty's Private Secretary wrote to Keshub, "I can assure you that the Queen was much pleased with her conversation with you, and Princess Louise took much interest in the subject you spoke about". Before Keshub left England the Queen graciously presented him with a large engraving of herself, and with two books—"The Early Years of the Prince Consort" and her "Highland Journal"—inscribed in her own hand-writing : "To Babu Keshub Chunder Sen, from Victoria Rg, Sept. 1870".

## *Keshub: A Philosopher and Thinker*

KESHUB CHUNDER SEN came with a burning passion for Divine Grace and an indomitable spirit. He had deep faith in his work and mission. He thundered, "Rest assured, my friends, when we are dead and gone, all the events that are transpiring around us in these days shall be written and embodied in history and shall be unto future generations a new gospel to God's saving Grace". ('Lectures in India', 1879)

He firmly believed that India claimed her place in the brotherhood of mankind not only because of her great antiquity but equally for her philosophical wisdom.

Keshub Chunder believed in complete annihilation of 'I', new birth of self, the birth of new 'I'—the 'Navasishu'—the new child—every inch of which is real, tremendously real—being in unison with the '*Akhanda Jiban* (one and undivided life) can purify us. Such life is possible, such visions and new births are granted. And therein alone lies the Redemption of Nations.

Brahmananda Keshub Chunder was such a soul. The God intoxicated man panted for new birth and was granted it. In his new birth, the programme of our national rebirth and regeneration of the whole world has been revealed.



As a philosopher and thinker Keshub Chunder draws our admiration.

Professor Max Mueller wrote on the death of Keshub Chunder:

“India has lost her greatest son, Keshub Chunder Sen.... there remains a sufficient amount of independent contemporary judgement to secure to Keshub Chunder Sen the first place among his fellow countrymen, and a pre-eminent place among the best of mankind..... As long as there is a religion in India, whatever its name may be, the name of Keshub Chunder Sen will be gratefully remembered as one who lived and died for the glory of God, for the welfare of mankind, and for the truth, so far as he could see it”.

There is no denying that Keshub Chunder had a philosophy of his own. In course of his *sadhana*—prayer and meditation—he gradually built it up. From 1857 to 1882, Keshub had crossed a distinct path which ultimately culminated into ‘Navavidhan’.

He explained his faith and creed in a lucid way. He spoke about himself before an audience which gathered at St. James Hall, London on May 28, 1870. In course of discussion on “Christ and Christianity”, he said:

“I appear before you as a Hindu Theist. I was born a Hindu, and in my early days I thought and felt and lived as a Hindu, going through all the rites and ceremonies of idolatry. In course of time English education upset my faith, and for two or three years I continued in a state of indifference.... At last it pleased Providence to reveal the light of truth to me in a most mysterious manner, and from that time there commenced a series of struggle, aspirations and endeavours, which resulted, I am happy to say, in peace and in the conversion of the heart.

The first lesson God taught me was that it was His will that I should pray. When no book brought me any comfort,

and no man rendered me any assistance whatsoever, God, in the mysterious way of Providence, pointed out to me the indispensable necessity of cultivating the habit of prayer; I persevered in that godly habit, and within a few weeks found that there was strength in my heart and abounding joy, and wisdom and purity.”

Then he discussed the influence of the Bible on him. He found marvellous truths which tallied exactly with the inner convictions of his heart, and these he not only accepted, but turned to account. He declared that he never studied Christianity by having recourse to controversial writings, not to those voluminous books which treat of the evidences of Christianity. He studied Christ ethically, nay spiritually; and the Bible in that same spirit.

He went to the core of the question—‘What is the creed taught in the Bible? What is Christianity? What is Christ?’

Keshub Chunder declared, “By Christ I understand one who said, ‘Thy will be done’; and when I talk of Christ I mean simply the spirit of loyalty to God, the spirit of absolute preparedness to say at all times, and in all circumstances, ‘Thy will be done’, not mine.”

Then Keshub directly asked his audience—“Are you prepared to give up the world? Does not London life tell me every moment that there is an attempt in every Christian sect to follow God and mammon? My Christ has told me repeatedly that I can never establish anything like a compromise between the two. His voice is clear—‘Take no thought for the morrow’.”

Keshub declared that he followed the advice of Christ and believed that the most holy and loving Father would not desert us in the hour of trial.

Keshub told his audience:

“I should be a traitor to the Universal Church of Theism to which I belong, if my heart and soul were not capacious

enough to take in the whole length and breadth of the Christian Church..... I appear before you tonight as an advocate of the religion of love. I wish sincerely and earnestly from the depths of my heart to proclaim to all nations the great doctrine of the unity of God's Church. Do not think that I ask you to give up your religion at present. No; what I mean is that we should try, in spite of our opinions, and principles, and proclivities, to build among ourselves a platform on which we can all stand and shake hands with each other as children of God.... Let ministers of the various sects exchange their pulpits with each other, let the brothers and sisters of one Church now and then go into another Church and shake hands with the utmost warmth and tenderness of heart with their brothers and sisters in the Church; then we shall find the electric fluid of divine and celestial flowing through the length and breadth of all Christian souls in England and elsewhere, and then, too, shall we find what Jesus anticipated,—not two hundred and fifty sects scattered here and there, but one grand universal Cathedral, where ten thousand voices of ten thousand nations shall commingle in one sweet and swelling chorus, and proclaim the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men."

This is the summum bonum of Keshub Chunder's faith: the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of men.

Keshub Chunder had lucidly explained his faith and creed. He declared, "Our creed is the science of God, which enlighteneth all; our gospel, the love of God which saveth all; our Heaven, life of God which is accessible to all; our Church, the invisible Kingdom of God, in which is all truth, all love, all holiness".

By way of explaining the electricism of the New Dispensation, Keshub Chunder wrote:

"Our position is not that truths are to be found in all religions, but that all the established religions of the world



are true.... That there are truths and therefore, as a matter of course, untruths in all religions, is easily intelligible, but it is a position the establishment of which is of no practical interest to a devout soul.... It (the New Dispensation) delights in God's things and beholds God in the littlest of things. Should it find any but God in the vast established regions of the world? No: It tells us, therefore, not that there are truths in every religion but that all religions are true. Christianity and Hinduism are true; they are both dispensations of God,—come to teach us something about God. Both are divine and God-sent; and as such they deal with truths. If there are untruths they are grafted on them by men, they cannot be God's, and we have nothing to do with them. The question is: Are the things related to God, preached by the august founders of these religions—founders who were inspired and who brought special messages from heaven, false?.... All religions are dispensations of God, sent to the world at special times for the salvation of humanity. That they have benefitted the world, that they have given human communities a lift from the original position of degradation, that they brought men one step nearer to God, that they have been the source of peace and consolation to millions, are facts borne out by history. That the founders of them were extraordinary men, sincere, devout, humble, honest, single-minded men, men who fearlessly declared their mission and preached truths not hitherto known is another fact which none can or ought to gainsay. The New Dispensation admits these facts; it therefore accepts them all as coming within the scope of divine providence. If then we insist that these religions are dispensations, we must infer that they are true." ('Sunday Mirror', October 23, 1881)

Keshub Chunder was very much keen on the issue of spreading 'New Dispensation' round about 1880. Before that he established the Brahmo Samaj of India (November 11, 1866) and opened Brahmo Mandir of India at Calcutta (August 22, 1869).

He proclaimed New Dispensation on January 26, 1880.

If we analyse the happenings and thought-process of Keshub Chunder during this period (1867-1880) we can get a clear picture of Keshub's philosophy.

Keshub delivered a lecture in the Medical College Theatre, Calcutta on 'Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia' on May 5, 1866. In that lecture he gave expression to the deep feeling of reverence he cherished for Christ. Many people in Calcutta, both Indian and European, felt convinced that Keshub Chunder Sen would openly embrace Christianity. On the other hand, this lecture drew the attention of high government officials upon Keshub, and Lord Lawrence, the Governor-General of India, expressed his desire to form Keshub's acquaintance.

In response to a requisition from a large number of Brahmos, a meeting was held in Calcutta on November 11, 1866, its object being stated by Keshub Chunder thus: "Our present object is simply to organise and incorporate the Bramho Community, to establish such enduring bonds of sympathy and union among the several members of our community as are essential to their individual and common welfare, to the consolidation and growth of our Church, and to the effectual propagation of Bramho Dharma (Theism)". And the Bramho Samaj of India was established (November 11, 1866).

Keshub Chunder was at that time observed far less in doctrinal questions than in practical measures of progress and reform. According to P.C. Mozoomdar, "The great spiritual exercises and emotional excitement began, and the first devotional festival was celebrated in November, 1867." ('Faith and Progress')

That was the beginning of an all-out advancement. Side by side with the spiritual excitement the most radical social reforms were commenced, the Native Marriage Act was passed, the Indian Reforms Association with its five sections was



established in 1870, and the Bharat Asram was opened in 1872. A Female Normal School was founded for training lady-teachers, and a temperance movement was supported by a special journal.

“Brahmo-Samajas began to spring up in different parts of the country as a result of this new agency. A most active missionary organisation was constituted, and the preachers were sent to travel from one part of the country to the other. All this culminated in the missionary expedition of 1879. The whole movement under the influence of such manifold activities began to take a new shape. New doctrines were conceived and preached. Yoga (spiritual exercises), Bhakti (devotion and love), and Asceticism were explained from a new point of view. Great reverence was felt for Christ and other Masters; pilgrimages to saints and prophets were encouraged; sacraments and ceremonials were instituted; and at last the New Dispensation, as the highest development of the Brahmo-Samaj, was proclaimed in 1880....” (Max Mueller, “Keshub Chunder Sen”, Ed. by N. Mookerjee, 1976.)

“To those who are acquainted with Hindu philosophy I could explain the difference between the two teachers very briefly, namely as a change from Pure Vedanta to Yoga”. Thus said Max Mueller in course of a comparative study between two leaders of the Brahmo Samaj, Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen.

Max Mueller continued, “Devendranath Tagore had fully realised the philosophic poetry of the Upanished and the more systematic teaching of the Vedanta-Sutras. He had found rest there, and he wanted little more. Keshub Chunder Sen saw the lofty height of thought at certain moments of his life, but he never reached it. And this, though to Devendranath it must have seemed weakness, constituted in many respects Keshub Chunder Sen’s real strength. While Devendranath was absorbed in himself, Keshub laboured all his life, not for



himself only, but for others. He wanted a pure but popular religion and philosophy for those who were still in the lowest stage of mythological faith, and this Devendranath could not give them." (Ibid)

Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar felt the same ('Theistic Review and Interpreter', July 1881). He wrote, "The present generation of Brahmos were intensely impressed through their Chief Teacher, Debendranath Tagore, with the supreme fact that God was an indwelling Spirit, and an All-pervading Soul. But it must be confessed that for purpose of personal piety, for tender devotions such as may call sinners to repentance and give salvation to the sorrow-stricken, the exalted teaching of Debendranath Tagore, great as it was, was not sufficient. Our conceptions required more fulness and definiteness. Though from the lips of the revered saint the strange beatitudes of his own faith fell like honey, and we drank it, and were filled with gladness and enthusiasm, yet God was to us an unknown God....Keshub Chunder Sen is and always has been a man of prayer. He began his religious life by appealing to God to show him the light of his face. He always insisted upon realising the presence of God before him, as the idolator, who unmistakably saw his idol present near his own body. Thus one of his characteristic teachings is that of seeing God. He means of course spiritual perception, vivid realisation in faith of the presence of the Supreme Spirit. But this process he describes to be exceedingly simple and natural. He says, in one of his sermons, that 'as it is easy for the body to see and hear, so it ought to be easy for the soul to see and hear. Hard struggles are not necessary for the soul to see God. Bring the soul to its natural condition, and you will succeed'."

The cream of Keshub Chunder's philosophy can be found in 'Jeevan Veda' or 'The Scriptures of Life' (published 1883). In the hot season of 1882, being in bad health, Keshub went for a change to Darjeeling. This visit to the Himalayas, as was his wont, he turned to account by engaging in intense practice of yoga. The impulse came to him to lay bare the deeper springs of

his life before his friends and associates. On his return to Calcutta he gave sixteen discourses under the title of *Jeevan Veda* (Scriptures of Life) from the pulpit of the Mandir of the 'Bharatbarsiya Brahmo Samaj'. These discourses were extemporary and prolix. They contained much periphrasis and imagery, not easily intelligible to people other than of Bengal without elucidatory notes. They have been translated into many languages—Sanskrit, Oriya, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi, English, French and German. There are many a translation into English among which the one done by Dr. P.S. Basu had been published by the Navavidhan Publication Committee in 1940. We take this translation as the basis of our discourse. A few lines are taken here from these sixteen lectures intended to lay bare the deepest springs of his life and conduct.

(a) "The first word of the scripture of my life is Prayer. When no one had helped me, when I had not entered the membership of any religious communion, had not accepted any form of faith by studying the different religions, had not resorted to the company of pious men or devotees; in that dawn of my religious life, the impulse came, the voice sounded in my heart—'Pray, pray'. I never enquired of any person who called me to pray; nor was there the misgiving that I might be mistaken. 'Pray, thou shalt be saved; thy character shall improve, thou shalt receive whatsoever thou lackest'; this voice rolled from the east to the west, from the north to the south of my life". (July 23, 1882. Chapter I—Prayer)

(b) "If you want to live, die once. Like Jesus, Buddha, Chaitanya walk into pain and agony and then come out. Blessed be the merciful! The happy flower of *Bhakti* now blooms in my life's garden. I adopted a spontaneous natural asceticism." (August 13, 1882. Chapter IV—Solitude and Detachment)

(c) "I cultivated *bhakti* and *yoga* conjointly. In the harp of my life one note began to be sounded. It is the note of *bhakti*; it



is also the note of *yoga*. When these two are one, the God of joy is found. You too will learn *yoga*, I give you this hopeful message. In my life *yoga* and *bhakti* have met.... I offer you hope, give you encouragement; holding on to the lotus feet of the Lord, be *yogis*, be *bhaktas*". (September 24, 1882, Chapter IX. The Accession of Yoga)

Thus Keshab explained his faith. No doubt, '*Jeevan Veda*' is a most important book in the religious literature of the nineteenth century, and may be considered the essence of Keshub Chunder's philosophy.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote about him : "I was fortunate enough to receive his (Keshub's) affectionate caresses at the moment when he was cherishing his dream of a great future of spiritual illumination. Since then I have journeyed on across a long stretch of time through the vicissitudes of amazing experiences of creative religion in Bengal which greatly owes its evolution to the dynamic power of the devotional genius of Keshub Chunder, till at last the opportunity is given me nearly at the end of my days when I could bring the offering of reverent homage in my own name and in that of my countrymen to the sacred memory of Brahmananda on the occasion of his centenary celebrations." (November 17, 1937)

This is a fitting tribute to Brahmanando Keshub Chunder, a great philosopher and thinker of our time.



## *A Journalist and Prose-maker*

KESHUB CHUNDER WAS a man of action and possessed a dynamic personality. He preached the message of love and universal brotherhood, throughout the length and breadth of India.

Set up in 1817, the Hindu College (Calcutta) played a vital role in the dissemination of western culture and education, the results of which were seen in subsequent years. Teachers of the Hindu College like Derozio and Richardson introduced their students to what they had learnt from the late eighteenth-century School of Free-thinkers in France. Enlightened by their teachings, the students of the Hindu College rebelled against the old and indigenous, raising the slogan: 'Break down everything old and place in its stead what is new'. The reverberations reached the literary world resulting in the growth of an open and inquiring mind and of a spirit of humanism among our writers and thinkers.

Be it remembered that Keshub Chunder Sen was a student of the Hindu College along with Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. They read in the Law Department of the College.

The Renaissance in Bengal began with the learning of English and through it the western thoughts. In the nineteenth century literature and business shifted from rural to urban

centres, and literature was marked by humanism. This can be said about religious activities. In the eighteenth century, the trend was still the Mangal Kavyas (the middle-age poetic tales with a Puranic background). In the nineteenth century, this pattern was replaced by humanism. Gods and goddesses were replaced by men and women, their worries and aspirations. This new trend was the product of the Renaissance.

The first half of the nineteenth century paved the way for a new literature which flourished in the second half though the literary achievements of this period were not spectacular, literature had still the following contributions to the Renaissance of Bengal: (a) Making of the Bengali prose; (b) Acting as a vehicle of western ideas; (c) Working for the cause of social reform and (d) Renewal of our literary heritage.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the modern Bengali literature bloomed and a vast amount of creative literary work appeared,—in poetry, drama, essays, fictional literature. Bengali creative mind excelled.

Keshub Chunder Sen belonged to the second half of the nineteenth century and inherited all the good produced in the first half of the century.

He was a prolific writer, good orator and successful organiser. In his hectic active life, he preached his religious belief in hundreds of meetings and published a number of English and Bengali journals, which became effective vehicles of his thought.

Keshub 'had many personal characteristics', as the *Indian Daily* news truly said, 'which fitted him for religious work. A fine countenance, a majestic presence, and that rapt look which of itself exerts an almost irresistible fascination over impressible minds, lent wonderful force to a swift, kindling, and poetical oratory which married itself to his highly spiritual teaching as perfect music into noble words'.

Keshub Chunder published nine journals in Bengali. We can have outlines of the same.

1. *The Vamabodhini Patrika*, a monthly journal was published in 1863. It was a journal for instruction of women.

The Native Ladies' Normal School, to train teachers was established by Keshub on February 1, 1871. The ladies of this school started (April 14, 1871) the Vama Hitaishini Sabha (Women's Welfare Society) where papers were read and discussed by them. Most of these papers were published in the *Vamabodhini Patrika*. This was edited by Umesh Chandra Dutta.

2. The '*Dharmatattva*' was started by Keshub in October 1864. It was first published as a monthly organ, subsequently it became fortnightly. It was devoted to religious discourses.

3. The *Sulav Samachar* (Cheap News) was published by the Cheap Literature section of the Indian Reform Association, founded by Keshub Chunder in November 1870. This Weekly pice (= a farthing) paper (1870) at once had a ready and extensive sale. It published articles, mostly from the pen of Keshub himself in simple and chaste Bengali, on religious, moral, social and political topics, besides general and technical information.

A few lines from one of these is given below by way of specimen (translated by Dr. P.S. Basu).

### ***Men of Consequence***

"Who are the people of importance in the country? Is it those who are moneyed, in other words, those who at one time made their living by working as artisan, washerman, or valet, but now, having acquired money somehow, are reputed to be men of rank? To tell the truth there are in the country now few families of aristocratic descent. But who after all are the real people of consequence? In our country it is the people of lower classes. If these people were not there, who could have his supply of provisions, ride



coaches and witness horse races, and enjoy a toilless leisure? It is indeed the insignificant people who supply all our needs. We live in affluence at their cost. But how many of us think of expressing gratitude to them? Toiling day and night, by the sweat of their brow they provide our food; but how many bestow a thought on their condition?

Where did such wealth and prowess as England possesses come from? From the very people of the lower classes. There will come a time on earth when the proletariat will not remain dumb, will not remain lying down on the ground in misery.... In the advanced countries there has already begun a class-war.... We do not desire that the proletarians should commit outrages. But we do certainly wish that they should, without committing unlawful deeds, bring the landowners to their senses". (August 15, 1871 issue)

4. *The Mada na Garal* (Wine or Poison) was started from 1871. It was a temperance monthly.

The Temperance Section of the Indian Reform Association (1870), with the valued co-operation of Paery Charan Sarkar, Headmaster of the Hare School, who had already been doing pioneer work in this direction, published pamphlets, and organised meetings and lectures, attended by workingmen in large numbers. This monthly was distributed freely among them.

5. *The Dharmasadhan* was published monthly from 1872. It was the organ of the Sangat-Sabha. It was edited by Umesh Chandra Dutta. It was priced one pice (= farthing). The activities of the Sangat-Sabha and summaries of the discourses of the Brahmo Mandir were published.

6. *The Balakbandhu* (Friends of the Young) edited by Keshub Chunder was first published as a fortnightly (April 18, 1878); later on it was published monthly (December 15, 1881). It was a pictorial magazine, priced one pice (= farthing). Stories,

poems, moral writings were published in this magazine.

7. *The Paricharika* was the organ of the Indian Reforms Association. It came out as a monthly magazine in 1872. It was edited by Protap Chunder Mozoomdar. Keshub Chunder was closely connected with this monthly magazine. The steps taken by him for the upliftment of women were reported and encouraged by this paper. The paper was conducted by the Arya Nari Samaj founded by Keshub Chunder.

8. *The Bisha-Bairy* (Enemy of the Poison) was published as a temperance journal in 1880. It was edited by Nandalal Sen, nephew of Keshub Chunder, published monthly and distributed freely. This was the organ of the Albert Band of Hope or the 'Ashalata' founded by Keshub Chunder. Young students of the Albert School were constituted into 'Albert Band of Hope'. This Band fought for the cause of temperance.

9. *The Nava-vidhan* was published weekly from 1880. It was the vehicle of New Dispensation as proclaimed by Keshub Chunder.

Keshub Chunder published six journals in English.

They are the following:-

1. *The Indian Mirror* was first published on August 1, 1866. It was an all-India nationalist paper in English, the only contemporary being '*The Hindu Patriot*' started by Kristodas Pal. With a view to propagate his ideas on educational, religious and other matters, Keshub started it as a fortnightly journal. Keshub's activities were doubled and manifolded within a short time and he felt the need of a daily organ in English. From the beginning of 1871 the *Indian Mirror* began to come out as a daily, this being the first daily newspaper conducted by an Indian. In course of time it became a powerful vehicle of Keshub Chunder. A good number of important articles by him were first published in it.

2. *The Liberal*, a weekly journal (January, 1882) was edited by

Krishna Behari Sen, younger brother of Keshub Chunder. After sometime it was amalgamated with 'The New Dispensation' and published under a new name-'The New Dispensation and the Liberal'.

3. *The Theistic Annual* was first published in 1872.

4. *The Theistic Review* (Quarterly) was first published in 1879. Both these journals brought out the addresses of Keshub Chunder delivered on special and annual functions of the Brahmo Samaj of India. In the first one reports of symposia were published while the second one co-ordinated the work of all the theistic organisations all over the world.

5. *The Sunday Mirror* was first published in June 1873 as a weekly organ under the direct guidance of Keshub Chunder. The motto of the organ—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards man"—was printed on the top of the first page of each issue. It became the vehicle for religious discourses.

6. *The New Dispensation* was first published on March 25, 1881 as a weekly organ. The Apostles' Durbar resolved to publish it. It was entirely written by Keshub so long as he was physically fit to do so. All the important religious functions and Keshub's lectures were reported in this weekly.

Keshub Chunder published a good number of books in Bengali and English.

We can give here the full list of the same (as prepared by Satikumar Chattopadhyay and Jogesh Chandra Bagal).

First the list of Bengali books:

*Duity Prarthana* (1861)

*Brahmo Dharmer Anusthan* (1862)

*Colutolla Brahmo Samaj* (1862)

*Pracharakder Prati Nivedan* (1865)

*Vidyar Prakrit Uddessya* (1865)

*Brahmo Dharma Pratipadak Sloka-Sangraha* (1866)



*Strir Prati Upadesh* (1866)  
*Bhakti* (1868)  
*Brahmotsav* (1868)  
*Upasana Pranali* (1869)  
*Brahmodiger Prati Nivedan* (1870)  
*Harinabhi Brahmo Samajer Utsavey Dharmalochana* (1871)  
*Dharma Sadhan* (1872)  
*Samajik Upasana Pranali* (1872)  
*Goalia Brahmo Samajey Baktrita* (1872)  
*Brahmo Samajer Matasar* (1873)  
*Katakuli Dharmakatha* (1873)  
*Katakuli Dharmopadesh* (1874)  
*Sukhi Parivar* (1874)  
*Saradiya Utsav* (1874)  
*Katakuli Prasnottvar* (1875)  
*Brahmo Dharma Key?* (1875)  
*Bowhati Brahmo Samajer Utsav* (1876)  
*Paramhanser Ukti* (1878)  
*Acharyar Upadesh* (1880)  
*Brahmikader Prati Upadesh* (1882)  
*Sevaker Nivedan* (1882)  
*Jeevan Veda* (1883)  
*Nava-Vidhan Preritaganer Prati Vidhi* (1886)  
*Brahmogitopanisad* (1887)  
*Sadhu Samagam* (1887)  
*Maghotsav* (1888)  
*Prarthana* (1884-85)  
*Dainik Prarthana* (1886-95)  
*Brahmopasana* (1901)  
*Paricharika* (1876/1915)  
*Biswas O Bhaktiyoga* (1867/1931)

The List of English books (Selected):

*Young Bengal, This is for You* (1860)  
*Be Prayerful* (1860)  
*Religion of Love* (1860)  
*Basis of Brahmoism* (1860)

- Brethren, Love your Father* (1860)  
*Signs of Times* (1860)  
*An Exhortation* (1860)  
*Testimonials to the Validity of Institution* (1861)  
*Atonement and Salvation* (1861)  
*The Theist's Prayerbook* (1861)  
*The Brahmo Samaj Vindicated* (1863)  
*True Faith* (1865)  
*An Appeal to Young India* (1865)  
*Jesus Christ—Europe and Asia* (1866)  
*Regenerating Faith* (1868)  
*Lectures and Tracts (Two Series)* (1870)  
*Nine Lectures on Educational Measures* (1872/1936)  
*Essays—Theological and Ethical Part-I* (1874)  
*We Apostles of New Dispensation* (1881)  
*Keshub Chunder Sen in England (2 Volumes)* (1881-82)  
*Lectures in India* (1883)  
*Yoga—Objective and Subjective* (1884)  
*The New Samhita* (1884)  
*The New Dispensation* (1884)  
*Essays—Theological and Ethical Part-II* (1886)

Keshub developed a new style of Bengali prose—forceful, fluent, simple and communicative. It was his own style. He touched millions of hearts through this lucid and racy prose. Keshub has a definite place in the realm of Bengali prose.

Keshub also developed a new style of English prose—based on oratory. It was poetical oratory which married itself to his highly spiritual teaching as perfect music unto noble words. Keshub's eloquent address in English from many pulpits in England left a deep imprint on the minds of the audience. This poetical oratory has influenced Keshub's English writings.

## *Keshub's Role as a Social Reformer*

KESHUB CHUNDER JOINED the Brahmo Samaj in 1857. He called Devendranath Tagore his 'Dharma-Pita' (religious father). "Devendranath upheld absolute sovereignty of human reason to know by its own intuitions all the highest truths about God, Soul and Salvation. He installed the new faith of Brahmo Samaj as pure and natural theism. Devendranath declared that ultimate sanctions of religion lay not in any supernatural authority but in the original intuitions of human mind." (Max Mueller—'Keshub Chunder Sen')

"The Brahmo Samaj under Devendranath", writes Bipin Chundra Pal, "was thus able to initiate a movement of religious reform and reconstruction which was both rational and national." ('The Brahmo Samaj and the Battle for Swaraj', Calcutta, 1915)

Under the combined influence of Devendranath and Keshub Chunder, the Brahmo Samaj stepped into a career of unusual activity. Young Keshub attracted a number of devoted young-men and established in 1859 the Brahmo Vidyalaya and in 1860 the Sangat Sabha to discuss questions of practical religion and active spirit of social reform was evinced by celebrating inter-caste marriages, discarding threads ('Upabita') by



Brahmins and by various other unorthodox practices.

William J. Potter, Secretary of the Free Religious Association (Massachusetts, USA) wrote a long letter on October 24, 1867 in which he asked Keshub Chunder Sen, Secretary of the Brahmo Samaj of India to give him information about the activities of the Brahmo Samaj and Brahmo movement. Keshub Chunder replied on February 24, 1868. In this letter he gave a short history of the Brahmo movement in India highlighting the deeds of Raja Rammohan Roy and Devendra-nath Tagore. But, he pointed out, the majority of the Brahmos kept aloof from the responsibility to discountenance such evil customs which supported idolatry and caste. They effected a safe but unconscientious compromise between the enlightened convictions of a Theist and the idolatrous social life of a Hindu. At that moment Keshub Chunder with his followers came forward.

He described in this letter how he fought with evils of idolatry and caste:

“A small number (of the Brahmos) however came forward at last and began the great work of reforming the social domestic economy of Hindu society on the basis of true religion, which has been developed more fully year after year, and has lately resulted in a variety of practical reforms, such as the abolition of caste distinctions, the marriage of widows, intermarriage (between members of different castes), the education and emancipation of women.... Our Church (Brahmo Samaj of India, November 1866) is thus at present an organised Theistic Church, Indian in its origin, but universal in its scope, which aims to destroy idolatry, superstition, and sectarianism, and propagate the saving truths of absolute religion and the spiritual worship of the one true god, and likewise to promote the intellectual, moral and social reformation of individuals and nations, and thus make Theism the religion of life.”

Hence we find Keshub Chunder gave much emphasis of social reformation. He found that as most of the social and domestic customs of the Hindus were interwoven with the evils of idolatry and caste it was incumbent on every true and sincere Brahmo to fight against such customs.

In the Brahmo Samaj of Devendranath the seminars of the 'Tattva Bodhini Sabha' and the worship of one true God were the only activities. Keshub Chunder introduced social reform and social service. He founded a few institutions with this aim. Now we can take them up one by one. Let us remember once again that Keshub Chunder joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1857 and next year the first trial came. Keshub was pressed hard by the elders of his 'Vaidya' Vaisnav family to submit to the customary ceremony of initiation into the orthodox Hindu faith (*mantra-diksha*); he stubbornly resisted and triumphed. He enacted the *Vidhava-Vivaha Nataka* (widow marriage drama) in April, 1859.

Keshub started the Calcutta Brahmo School (School of Theology) on April 24, 1859. "This Brahmo School was an all-important institution.... It not only produced a body of intelligent doctrines, and systematised the uncertain conceptions of Theism on a sound rational basis of philosophy, such as modern thought throughout the world laid down to be the rudiments of all religions, but it created a nucleus of well-trained men whose sympathy, devotedness, and active cooperation made all future progress in the Brahmo Samaj possible." (P.C. Mozoomdar)

Keshub began to publish monthly 'The Tracts of the Times' (June 1860) and gave a clarion call to the Young Bengal to come forward and break the chain of social and moral injustice.

Keshub started a society named Sangat Sabha for religious conversations (September, 1860).

Then he took up the cause of education in India in a special meeting of Brahmo Samaj. They considered the best means of promoting education in this country (October 3, 1861). In moving the resolution Keshub made a speech on 'The Promo-



tion of Education in India', in which he asked for a programme of national education in India. At that time spread of education was very limited. No attention was paid to female or mass education. The facility of education for males was in the least able to cope with the needs of the country.

Keshub offered solution to the situation in his scheme published in the 'Tattvabodhini Patrika'.

In August 1861 Keshub started 'The Indian Mirror'—an all India nationalist paper in English (fortnightly, afterwards daily).

Keshub established the Calcutta College, first private college with a distinctive syllabus of its own, on March 1, 1862. "Keshub never believed in combining theological teaching with ordinary education, he thought it sufficient to teach the youthful mind the elements of morality and simple natural religion. But he was the most staunch believer in early moral training and the power of example exercised by good and spiritually-minded teachers" (P.C. Mozoomdar). This college catered for the same.

The Colutolla Sishu Vidyalaya was started in 1862. It was held every Saturday evening teaching general knowledge and giving moral training.

Keshub delivered a lecture on "Social Reformation in India" (February 21, 1863). He opined that social reformation must be preached by and based upon religious reformation. That was the first principle. The second principle was the necessity of securing positive reforms by making the destructive and constructive agencies work together. The third principle, as enunciated by him, was to harmonise independence and authority. The fourth and last principle was the union of courage and deliberation.

Then Keshub discussed the question of domestic and social ceremonies. Among the six ceremonies of social life Keshub indicated that *Upanayan* and *Dharmadiksha*, *Vivaha* and *Anteshti Kriya* were most important and the three others



*Jatakarma*, *Namakarana* and *Sraddha* were unimportant. He admitted that the three ceremonies mentioned earlier must be regarded as necessary institutions of society and had moral significance. "They partake of both religion and custom, and involve the interest of Church and society as well as of individuals. They are of religious importance and of national importance.... In reference to these, society, as a corporate body, has a ruling authority and to that each individual member should yield." Keshub has shown how far these ceremonies were necessary and important, and how far the question of duty involved in them.

According to Keshub: "Each of the ceremonies under review is but an application of religion to the affairs of social and domestic life. This is the essence of the ceremonies and has a moral import. But this application is external and necessarily involves some amount of form which should not be confounded with the essence. To be grateful to God for every temporal blessing is a duty, and carries with it the weight of moral obligation; but the form in which and the accompaniment with which that gratitude is displayed cannot be morally binding but constitute the peculiar province of each man's individual judgment and taste. Brahmoism holds that only to be obligatory and binding which has the sanction of conscience, all the rest it leaves to the free judgment of every individual. This is the grand difference between it and idolatry, which exacts religious conformity even with the non-essential matters of form."

With this view, Keshub strived for positive social reformation throughout his life and reminded his audience that the best foundation for the prosperity of a nation was pure faith, and that unless this was laid deep in its life, mere secular measures would fail to effect any substantial or lasting improvement.

The Brahmo Bandhu Sabha (Brahmo Friends' Association) was established by Keshub Chunder in 1863, with three departments—(1) for lectures and discourses on the religion of the Brahmo Samaj,—(2) for publication of books and pam-

phlets on Brahmoism, and—(3) for the education of women at home. Keshub tried to reach and serve maximum number of middle class and poor people through this organisation.

The first attempt was made for the spiritual emancipation of women. "Antahpur Upasana" was started at Jorasanko, Tagore's ancestral house (1863). Simultaneously, "Antahpur Stree Shiksha Sabha" was started from where female teachers, Indian and European, were sent to individual families for teaching women. And a journal 'Bama Bodhini Patrika' was also started in 1863.

The inter-caste widow re-marriage was solemnised by Keshub Chunder on August 2, 1864.

Keshub founded "Brahmika Samaj" (1865)—a society conducted by women for promotion of religious culture and technical education among women.

A girls' school was also started by him in the same year. First social gathering of ladies was organised in Calcutta on November 24, 1866.

Thus Keshub had made an all-out attempt for emancipation—spiritual and temporal—of women.

Keshub received support in his attempt for promotion of education of women from Miss Mary Carpenter who arrived in India in November 1866. She was an Unitarian Philanthropist of England who came down to India with the object of working for the advancement of Indian women. The Brahmika Samaj received and presented her an 'Address' (November 14). It was her influence that led Keshub later to establish a Teachers' Training College for Women, and a Ragged School for Boys (1867).

Keshub went on an all-India missionary tour during the years 1864-1868 and visited southern, western and eastern regions of India. This was his first attempt to knit together the different provinces of India around a programme of moral regeneration.



As a result the Veda Samaj of Madras (1864) and the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay (1867) sprang up. And the "Brahmo Samaj of India" was formed by Keshub for the co-ordination of all theistic organisations in India.

During his tour in Bombay, Keshub Chunder delivered an address in the Bombay Town Hall (March 24, 1868) on "Religious and Social Reformation" In course of the address he said:

"I do not belong to that school of social reformation according to whom Indian reform means nothing more than strong garrisons on the frontier, irrigation, female education, inter-marriage, and widow-marriage. If you wish to regenerate this country, make religion the basis of all your reform movements. Hindu society has a very peculiar structure. Here in India we do not see religion on one side, society on the other; but religion and society are interwoven with each other. If, therefore, you wish to reform the social organism of India, you must, in the first instance, give her true religion, or else your attempt will be ineffectual.... Remember that, even in social reform, moral courage and enthusiasm are necessary. That courage, that enthusiasm, can only be procreated by true faith. Be true to God, and then, when you embark on the enterprise of Indian social reformation, you will not shrink back from its difficulties".

Keshub founded the Temperance Association on August 25, 1868. At its inaugural meeting, in which the Viceroy and a large number of Europeans were present, Keshub Chunder, in a fervent speech, advocated efforts on behalf of the temperance in India.

After returning from his visit to England (February to September, 1870) Keshub Chunder started with a new plan. Within a few days of his arrival he had assembled (October 25) his associates at his house to discuss plan of work. The discussion took shape in the establishment of the "Indian Reform Association"



(November 2) "with a view to promote the social and moral reformation of the country" with the following sections—(1) Female Improvement, (2) Education of the Working Classes and Technical Education, (3) Cheap Literature for the Poor, (4) Temperance, and (5) Charity.

We have discussed Keshub's attempts in these fields in Chapter I and III. We can briefly state his manifold activities.

In connection with the Female Improvement Section, an Adult School was immediately started. The Native Ladies' Normal School, to train teachers was established on February 1, 1871, and a practising Girls' School was added in September, 1871. The ladies of the Normal School started (April 14, 1871) the Vama Hitaishini Sabha (Women's Welfare Society), where papers were read and discussed by them.

The Cheap Literature Section began to publish a weekly pice (= one farthing) paper, the 'Sulabh Samachar' (Cheap News) (April 15, 1870), which at once had a ready and extensive sale.

The Temperance Section published pamphlets, and organised meetings and lectures attended by working men in large numbers. A temperance monthly paper in Bengali entitled "Mada na Garal" (wine or poison) was started and distributed freely from 1871.

The Charity Section worked all over the country. Fever epidemic relief was organised in Behala, near Calcutta (1872). Famine relief at Madras was organised (1871). Over rupees six thousand were collected and sent. Keshub gave away his own gold chain and watch and in later life he never used a gold chain.

The question of Female Improvement was emphasised by Keshub Chunder times without number. "At a meeting of the Bengal Social Science Association (February 14, 1871), Keshub delivered an address on Native Female Improvement. He recalled the high position and enlightenment of women in ancient India, regretted their fallen condition in modern times,

mentioned the recent efforts made for their education, and suggested the following measures for their improvement: (1) the establishment of Normal Schools to train lady teachers, (2) appointment of an Inspectress to supervise the work of these teachers, (3) opening of adult classes, (4) engaging secular (i.e. non-denominational) teachers for the Zenana, (5) conducting visits to interesting places, such as the Asiatic Museum and the Botanical Gardens, and (6) holding periodical examinations and giving prizes." (Dr. P.S. Basu)

In 1871, the "Band of Hope",—temperance order was started. As a result of Keshub's intensive activities in this field, the Government had to make special enquiries into the working of liquor policy and the revision of Bengal Excise System had to be introduced under Excise Act (II of 1876).

Keshub Chunder started two special schools with a view to the upliftment of the middle class and working class.

For the middle class people, "Industrial School" was started (November 28, 1871). They could learn here the following subjects—carpentry, tailoring, watch and clock repairing, printing, lithography, book-binding and engraving to add to their income.

For the working men, a Night School named "Working Men's Institution" was started in 1871. This institution imparted scientific knowledge of their profession and also literary education on a novel syllabus, simple and most useful, and moral training.

Keshub Chunder started "Bharat Asram" on February 5, 1872. This was the first endeavour for nation-building. It was housed at Belgharia, near Calcutta, for the cultivation of spiritual fellowship by living together with families and children, as one family. The importance of this institution was discussed in Chapter I.

Keshub Chunder started Indian marriage reform movement as early as 1867. He fought relentlessly against the evils of

casteism and advocated inter-caste marriage. The Special Marriage Act (Act III of 1872) was passed on March 19, 1872 as a result of Keshub's working and extensive efforts for six years. It has been discussed in Chapter I.

This Act is only an approach to Keshub's plan, who believed in marriage as sacrament and not a thing to be consummated by registrars. Due to the obstruction of some orthodox and conservative parties, the Government could not accept Keshub's ideas in toto. But abolition of polygamy, child-marriage and removal of social ban on inter-caste marriage was so urgent that Keshub accepted this Act. It was one of the great triumphs of his career as a reformer, nation-builder and first author of secularism in India.

It has also to be admitted that Keshub Chunder was a pioneer of female education, adult education, technical education and mass education. He started the Indian Reform Association and other institutions for the social, moral and religious reformation of India. Keshub Chunder's quest for national education and social reformation must be given credit as he fought for Indian nation.



## *Keshub and the Renaissance of India*

“THE NINETEENTH CENTURY has been a crucial period of Indian history that witnessed the transition from mediaevalism to modernism. The impact of western civilisation was particularly felt in Bengal which became the focal point of this culture contact, so much so that the period came to be marked out as an era of Renaissance. Momentous changes took place in the different facets of Bengali life and society which gradually radiated to cover the whole of India”. (Dr. S.K. Mitra, Preface to “Renascent Bengal”, 1972)

The period in which Rammohan Roy was born (1774) and grew up was the darkest age in modern Indian history. An all-round reconstitution and renovation were required for the continued existence of social life and order. At the fag end of the eighteenth century, India had not seen any ray of hope.

“Collapse of political authority, dead tradition, fossilised custom, meaningless superstition and irrational bigotry had choked the lifestream of the nation. Blind belief and inability to make inquiry into the sequence between the cause and effect contributed to the existence of superstition and ignorance. Brahmin priests earned their position and livelihood by making popular expositions of Hindu mythol-

ogy and by instilling false ideas about religion. A large number of deities were introduced to Hindu pantheon and their worship was associated with animal sacrifice and extravagant expenses. Inhuman practices such as 'Suttee', throwing of children into the Ganges and female infanticide were accorded religious sanction. Indian women were subjected to various oppressions in the name of religion and unjustified and cruel social laws put them in chain. They were compelled to lead a life of prisoners. Unlettered priests who held dignified social status by virtue of heredity became uncrowned monarchs of Hindu Society". (N. Mookerjee, Introduction of F. Max Mueller's 'Keshub Chunder Sen', 1976)

At that dark moment appeared Rammohan Roy on the stage of Indian history to save India from impending crash.

Rammohan Roy, in his youth, made an extensive study of both Islamic and Christian theology and developed a thoroughly modern and cosmopolitan outlook as well. His inquiry into the cause of the existence of superstition and ignorance of human beings led him to conclude that "they through the influence of habit and custom and blindness to the enquiry into the sequence between the cause and effect, believe the bathing in a river and worshipping a tree or being a monk and purchasing forgiveness of their crime from the high priests etc. (according to the peculiarities of different religions) to be the cause of the salvation and purification from sins of a whole life. And they think that this purification is the effect of these objects of their beliefs and the miracle of their priests and not the result of their own belief and whims, while these do not produce any effect on those who do not agree with them in those beliefs". (Saumendranath Tagore, 'Raja Rammohan Roy', 1966)

Rejecting the dogma of the supernatural power or miracle he wrote:

"It is customary with common people labouring under

whims that when they see any act or thing done or found, beyond their power of comprehension, or for which they cannot make out any obvious cause, they ascribe it to supernatural power or miracle. The secret lies in this, that as this world where things are naturally related to one another by a sequent relation of cause and effect, the existence of everything depends upon a certain cause and condition, so that if we take into consideration the remote causes, we may see that in the existence of any one thing in nature, the whole universe is connected. But when for want of experience and through the influence of whims, the cause of a thing remains hidden to anyone, another person having found it a good opportunity for achieving his object ascribes it to his own supernatural power and thereby attracts people to himself". (Ibid)

Rammohan Roy fought against this dogma of the supernatural power or miracle.

Rammohan Roy was the first man in India who wrote against the errors of idolatry and advocated the cause of monotheism. While studying Persian and Arabic at Patna, the Muslim culture, philosophy, particularly the Sufi ideas exerted great influence on him. He wrote a Persian treatise entitled "Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin", or "The Gift to the Deists" (1803) on the doctrine of Deism. It marks the period when Rammohan had just emerged from the idolatry of his age but had not yet risen to the sublime Theism and Theistic worship first proclaimed in the Trust-deed of the Adi Brahma Samaj. This treatise is a work protesting against the idolatries and superstitions of all creeds and trying to lay a common foundation of Universal Religion in the doctrine of the unity of Godhead. In his very first pamphlet Rammohan really advocated for supremacy of man's reason and conscience over all outside authority, whether of scripture and priest or prophet.

In 1814 Rammohan came down from Rangpore (now in Bangladesh) after resigning from the post of Dewan of Col. Digby



and settled in Calcutta. In that year he founded a society called "Atmiya Sabha" or the Society of Friends for open discussion of religious truths, including translations of many Sanskrit monotheistic treatises. In 1820 Rammohan published a book called "The Precepts of Jesus" and issued a number of appeals to the Christians upholding monotheism against the Trinitarian doctrines of Christianity. This publication brought upon him a fierce attack by the Christian missionaries of Serampur (near Calcutta). "On August 20, 1828, Rammohan organised a purely Theistic service in the northern part of Calcutta which marked the formal beginning of the Brahmo Samaj movement. A Theistic Chapel in the central part of the city was formally consecrated on January 23, 1830. At that time when he set up the Brahmo Samaj, Rammohan wanted it to be simply a meeting-ground of all sects for the worship of one true God". (N. Mookerjee, Introduction to F. Max Mueller's 'Keshub Chunder Sen', 1976)

Rammohan's problem was "how to find a point of rapport, of concord, and of unity among the three bodies of culture, three civilisations which were in constant state of war—the Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian". (Ibid)

By founding Brahmo Samaj he pointed the way to the solution of the problem of international culture and civilisation in human history, and thus, "became a precursor, an archetype, a prophet of coming Humanity. He laid the foundation of the true League of Nations in a League of National Cultures". (Brajendra Nath Seal, "Rammohan the Universal Man")

Rammohan Roy, it must be admitted, had sown the seeds of reform by founding the Brahmo Samaj in 1830. In 1831 he had to leave for England, where he was laid to rest on September 27, 1833. Rammohan was the precursor of Renaissance in India.

The saga of the Renaissance in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century is closely interwoven with the thinking and

activities of a group of young intellectuals who waged a revolt against the tradition or attitude of conformity in the society. The group of young rebels is popularly known as 'Young Bengal'. The great intellectual ferment that started with Rammohan entered a new phase of challenge. Who are these Young Bengals? "Young Bengal may be said to include that portion of intelligent Hindus who were led to disbelieve the religion of Shastras. Guided by more enlightened views about religion, morality or ethics, they were inclined to expose the system of Hindu idolatry—a circumstance which has drawn upon their heads the wrath and indignation of the whole orthodox Hindus. They have been reckoned as a separate and distinct class and their principles quite inimical to Hinduism". (Kishore Chand Mitra)

The Young Bengal was also known as 'Derozians' in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century. The expression 'Young Bengal' was synonymous with a rebel spirit resulting from radical intellectualism. In the second half of the last century the Young Bengal movement underwent a gradual transformation. Unstinted aggressiveness was sobered as a result of the conservative challenge and a general apathy in the society. Henry Vivian Derozio, one of the teachers of the Hindu College, drew around him a band of talented, volatile young students as his philosophical disciples. Derozio preached the cult of challenging orthodox ideas. Among the disciples of Derozio, we can mention the names of Tarachand Chakravorty, Rasik Krishna Mullick, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Rev. Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay.

Under the leadership of Raja Rammohan Roy a crusade against social evils had already started. A trend of ultra-radicalism took an aggressive shape during the Young Bengal period. The greatest contribution of Derozio was that he could shake up the young minds from a long deep slumber in a tradition-bound society ridden with manifold social and religious problems. The Young Bengal group became famous more



for their attitude of negation than for their positive contributions. Their activities were confined to formation of associations and preaching of radical views through their journals. We can mention a few associations, viz. 'The Academic Association', 'The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge' (1838), 'The Bengal British India Society' (1843). They published a few journals, viz. 'The Enquirer', 'The Jnananveshan', 'The Bengal Spectator' (1842). The Young Bengal discussed with great enthusiasm a wide range of subjects, but had no solid programme. Much of the energy of the group was spent in fruitless intellectual jugglery. But, it must be admitted, in spite of their failure, the role of the Young Bengal in the nineteenth century Renaissance can hardly be minimised. They introduced controversies in the Renaissance in Bengal, but at the same time added significance to it. (See two papers on 'Young Bengal' by Dr. Tarasankar Banerji and Dr. Chittabrata Palit published in "Renascent Bengal", 1972)

Raja Rammohan Roy, the Hindu College (1817), Young Bengal Group and the Asiatic Society—all paved the way for Renaissance in Bengal, nay, in India. They can be characterised as early products of Western thought and ideas. Their contribution to the Renaissance of Bengal cannot be overlooked. It should also be admitted that the part played by them in introducing the new spirit in our national life paved the advent of Renaissance in India.

After the demise of Rammohan Roy (in Bristol, England, September 27, 1833) Devendranath Tagore came to the rescue of the Brahmo Samaj which was reduced to a moribund state. He joined the Brahmo Samaj (1838) and set up a Society called the Tattva Bodhini Sabha (Truth Teaching Society, 1839). In 1843 he, with twenty associates, joined the Brahmo Samaj formally and publicly. A monthly journal, 'The Tattva Bodhini Patrika', was also published (1843).

Rammohan Roy founded the 'Brahmo Samaj' in 1830 with the principles of its cosmopolitan worship of one God. The



Brahmo community was not yet formed. Devendranath Tagore, the second leader of the Brahmo Samaj, developed the form of Divine Service and theology. He gave shape to the Brahmo religion. By a covenant he along with twenty others were initiated into Brahmo religion in 1843.

“The Tattvabodhini Patrika began to publish translations of the Vedas and the Upanishads and gave free expression to discussion about the new faith. The infallibility of the Vedas was a doctrine implicitly believed by the members of the Samaj till that time. But the belief soon led to internal discussions amongst the organisation compelling Devendranath to appraise the whole issue of scriptural infallibility. He deputed four learned Brahmins to study the Vedas at Benaras and examine the truth or otherwise of the statement that they preached only monotheism. They came back with the findings that while the Upanishads propounded the existence and worship of One Only God Without A Second, there was mention of many deities in the Vedas which ordained their worship. This resulted in open repudiation of not only the Vedic but all scriptural authority whatsoever by the Brahmo Samaj under the leadership of Devendranath. He upheld absolute sovereignty of human reason to know by its own intuitions all the highest truths about God, Soul and Salvation. He installed the new faith of Brahmo Samaj, as pure and natural theism. Devendranath declared that ultimate sanctions of religion lay not in any supernatural authority but in the original intuitions of human mind.” (N. Mookerjee, Ibid)

In 1857, the third great leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshub Chunder Sen, took charge. Since then, the Brahmo Samaj assumed a revolutionary role and brought over a complete change in the social, religious and private lives of the people. To live according to the dictates of the Living God became their watchword. Emancipation and enlightenment of women, up-

rooting caste system and untouchability, awakening and uplift of the masses and the practice of strict moral principles were stated. In 1864, by a hurricane tour, Keshub invited Bengal, Bombay, Madras and the Punjab to unite on a common platform of moral and religious reforms for national integration and regeneration. From 1866, he publicly renounced sectarianism and racialism. The synthesis of religions and cultures was practised and the new Inter-Marriage Law was enacted. Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man became a reality. Harmonious development of the complete personality of man became their creed. On January 26, 1880 Keshub Chunder Sen proclaimed the New Dispensation or the Religion of Harmony. Within two years, by his lectures, correspondence, personal contacts and journals, he roused practically the whole of India to a new dimension. He died on January 8, 1884.

Religious reform movement of the three leaders of the Brahmo Samaj—Rammohan, Devendranath and Keshub Chunder—had definitely a social purpose before it. It should be admitted that the Brahmo movement would not have emerged as a powerful force in our national life, had not its cause been taken up after Rammohan's death by Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen. Under their leadership the Brahmo Samaj grew in strength and soon acquired a position of importance in the life of Bengal, nay, of India.

Thus the religious ferment in Bengal did much for the Renaissance of India.

Before we consider Keshub's place in the Renaissance of India, we can go through his assessment of Young Bengal, Rammohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore. This could help us to discover the mental framework of Keshub Chunder.

We have discussed the role played by the Young Bengal group and seen that a theoretical approach to contemporary social problems, however gilded it may be, cannot usher in an era of fruitful changes.



Keshub Chunder was pained to notice this drawback. In a tract entitled "Young Bengal, This is for you" (1860) he said, "Witness the improvement of societies, friendly meetings, debating clubs, literary associations etc., whose number is hourly increasing. Many and varied are the schemes proposed for the country's good but hardly do they pass beyond the pales of theory. Social reforms are speculated upon but not practically undertaken.... True, there are acute understandings and powerful intellects; and brilliant rhetorical attainments.... but where is the heart to work?"

The observation is equally applicable to the earlier phase of the Young Bengal movement started by the Derozians.

Keshub Chunder wrote a long letter to Rev. Wm. J. Potter, Secretary of the "Free Religious Association", New Bedford, Massachusetts, USA on February 21, 1868 in response to a letter sent by Rev. Potter requesting Keshub to supply information about the Theistic movement in India. In his letter, Keshub dwelt upon the respective roles played by Rammohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore. Keshub, in his letter, precisely stated what were their achievements.

Keshub wrote in his letter:

"When English education had just opened the minds of some of my countrymen to the errors of Hindu idolatry, the late Raja Rammohan Roy, the great religious reformer of India, whose name is probably known to you, established a church in Calcutta, for the worship of the Supreme Being, under the name of the "Brahmo Samaj" or the Assembly of the worshippers of God. His direct object in founding this church was to persuade his countrymen to forsake idolatry and become monotheists; and the more successfully to accomplish this object he made the Vedas, the earliest scriptures of the Hindus, the basis of all his teachings. In other words, he professed simply to effect a revival of the unitarian faith and worship of ancient Hinduism. But he had also a higher and more comprehen-



sive object. He invited all sorts and descriptions of people without distinction, to unite in the worship of their common Father, the Supreme God of all nations; and to this end he proved by appeals to the texts of the Bible and Koran, as he did in the case of Hinduism, that Christianity and Mohammedanism were both essentially monotheistic. He accordingly directed that the service to be held in his church should always be of such a catholic character as to 'strengthen the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds'."

Keshub Chunder analysed the importance of Rammohan's role in ushering Renaissance in India. Rammohan was the first educated and high-caste Hindu to hold out an open challenge to polytheism and idolatry, and therein lies the importance and real significance of his movement. Its spirit of universalism, as pointed out by Keshub, greatly influenced the attitude of the newly created educated middle class in the field of thought. In short, we can point out that Rammohan ushered in new thoughts in the religious life of India. He offered two cardinal principles, viz., renunciation of polytheism and abjuring idol worship. There lies the importance of his role in the field of Renaissance in India. Keshub Chunder had indicated this in his letter.

Then Keshub proceeded to analyse the role played by Devendranath Tagore. According to him:

"Tagore gave it (the Brahmo Samaj) a new life and immensely extended its operations. He converted this body of mere worshippers into an association of believers, by binding them to a few articles of belief and to a covenant enjoying moral purity of life....He succeeded in the course of a few years in enrolling hundreds of followers .....All this time, the Vedas were regarded as the sole foundation of faith, and the members of the Brahmo Samaj were known as Vedantists. It was not till about twenty years ago (c.1848) that the Vedas ceased to be viewed in the light of

infallible scriptures, and made room for a more catholic and unexceptionable basis of faith, viz.,—God's revelation in nature and the religious instincts of man. The Brahmo Samaj since became a purely Theistic church."

From this analysis we get a clear picture of Devendranath's achievements. They are—(a) The famous Brahmo Covenant of 1843, a list of solemn vows which, in the form of a pledge, had to be signed by every member of the Brahmo Samaj; (b) A formal ceremony of initiation was introduced, and thus the Samaj was converted into a spiritual fraternity; (c) A new form of divine service was introduced; (d) Devendranath offered two cardinal principles, viz., abstention from idolatry, and worship of one God through loving Him. To Devendranath, original Hinduism was nothing but pure theism. He fought against the menace of Christianity and rejected the monistic interpretation of the Vendanta as given by Sankaracharya. Devendranath propagated this new Brahmo doctrine through his journal, the 'Tattvabodhini Patrika' (1843), and other two organisations—the Tattvabodhini Sabha (1839) which soon became, "a common platform for the elite of the mid-nineteenth century Bengal" and the Tattvabodhini Pathshala (1840).

By all these measures Devendranath facilitated the advent of Renaissance in India.

"The Brahmo Samaj under Devendranath," wrote Bipin Chandra Pal, "was thus able to initiate a movement of religious reform and reconstruction which was both rational and national," ('The Brahmo Samaj and the Battle for Swaraj', 1945).

Then appeared Keshub Chunder Sen, the third great leader of the Brahmo Samaj. He joined it in 1857. Young Keshub attracted a number of devoted youngmen and established in 1859 the 'Brahmo Vidyalaya' and in 1860 the 'Sangat Sabha' to "discuss questions of practical religion, and active spirit of social reform was evinced by celebrating inter-caste marriages, discarding threads (*upabita*) by Brahmins and by various



unorthodox practices.” (N. Mookerjee, Ibid)

In his letter to Rev. Wm. J. Potter, Keshub Chunder wrote about the role played by young Brahmo rebels headed by him. He wrote:

“It was incumbent on every true and sincere Brahmo to discountenance such (social and religious) customs (followed by the Hindu)...The majority kept aloof from this bold undertaking effecting a safe but unconscientious compromise between the enlightened convictions of a Theist and the idolatrous social life of a Hindu. A small number however came forward at last, and began the great work of reforming the social and domestic economy of Hindu society on the basis of true religion, which has been developed more fully year after year, and has lately resulted in a variety of practical reforms, such as the abolition of caste distinctions, the marriage of widows, inter-marriage (between members of different castes), the education and emancipation of women etc.”.

Then Keshub proceeded to narrate the founding of his Church:

“With a view to render our church wholly free from the narrow spirit of Hindu sectarianism and the evils of Hindu social life, and to establish it firmly on a catholic and pure basis, by incorporating into its theology the truths of all scriptures, and admitting into its membership theists of all nations, and bringing its social life into harmony with the pure dictates of conscience, the advanced Brahmos organised themselves into a society, in November 1866, under the name of the “Brahmo Samaj of India”. This society also seeks to establish closer intercourse and more active co-operation than hitherto existed among all the Brahmo Samajes in India and to propagate our faith more extensively and systematically throughout the country. Our church is thus at present (1868) an organised Theist church,



Indian in its origin, but universal, in its scope, which aims to destroy idolatry, superstition, and sectarianism, and propagate the saving truths of absolute religion and the spiritual worship of the one true God, and likewise to promote the intellectual, moral and social reformation of individuals and nations, and thus make Theism the religion of life.”

Through all these steps, Keshub Chunder Sen furthered the cause of Renaissance. He believed that the tendency of the age was towards Theism. Hence a large portion of the educated community became Theists in some form or other. He believed that rationalism, universalism and religious pursuits came with Western education. To be a Theist was to become a modern man—that was his belief. He declared at the fag end of the letter that they (advanced Brahmos) professed the universal and absolute religion whose cardinal doctrine was “the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood fo man” and which accepted the truths of all scriptures and honoured the prophets of all nations. This universal standpoint is the basis of Keshub Chunder’s religious belief and we can term it as humanist religion of Renaissance. The main tracts of Renaissance can easily be found in Keshub’s declaration of faith, which runs thus at the end of his letter : “We now feel, as we never felt before, that God’s religion shall spread throughout the length and breadth of the world, destroying all false creeds and sects, and uniting all nations in one universal brotherhood.”

So we can conclude that Keshub Chunder Sen has a place in the Renaissance of India. He conceived a national regeneration with moral regeneration and religious awakening.

## *Keshub as a Spokesman of India*

KESHUB CHUNDER SEN many years ago expressed his conception of a great man. "The peculiar destiny of every great man", he said, "is to live and die for one idea. This idea is nothing more than a definite plan of the particular reform needed at the time. Around him he finds society degraded, impoverished, and ruined; within him lies an ideal of what society ought to be—an ideal which constantly seeks to realise and to develop itself. His life is thus a life of continued struggle, which ceases only with his life itself." The one idea of Keshub Chunder Sen was the advancement of his countrymen to loftier standards of morality, of religion, and of freedom of thought. For that he lived, and with that idea he died.

Keshub Chunder was a man who had the real welfare of his fellow countrymen most deeply at heart. And his anxiety for their welfare was not limited by the thoughts of this world, its honours and advantages, but it took a far wider range and a higher sphere. While he wished to see his followers good citizens and loyal subjects, he hoped that when this transitory world shall have passed away, they might find a greater and a far more enduring advantage in that life which is to come. For this he strove; for this he laboured night and day; for this he spent his life, and, for this he gave his life for his fellow countrymen.

The name of Keshub Chunder Sen will be associated with an age of religious and moral revival in his country's annals. It has been truly said that a great man is the product of his age, and that he is made by his age. But, in a larger and far truer sense, he builds the age, impresses upon it his genius and his character. So it was with Keshub Chunder Sen. He imparted an unusual impetus to the moral and social aspirations of his countrymen.

History teaches us the great truth that, when the spirit of inquiry has once been called forth into play in the field of religion, it is sure to vent itself in other departments, and to display its activity in matters relating to the government of the country. The reformation in England was but the signal for the establishment upon a broad basis of the unchangeable principles of English liberty. The religious awakening of the Sikh people, under the teachings of Guru Nanak, was the precursor of the political greatness of the Sikh people. Such is the case of Keshub chunder Sen and the Indian society. He was a great religious teacher. He was also a national hero and builder of modern India. He was also a great social reformer, and he was, above all, the friend of women. He fully recognised the truth that man's progress means women's progress, and that no community can advance without the advancement of women. Keshub Chunder said, "To elevate India to a fitting place in the scale of nations, we must try to liberate our females from the thralldom of ignorance and superstition.... I should, however, place education, moral training and social reformation first, and these will in the natural course of things, lead to what is called the emancipation of women.... If you give our ladies sound liberal education you will give them the liberty which they ought to enjoy and all the blessings of pure enlightenment and reformation.... I hope and trust that if you desire at all to enlighten and alleviate the conditions of Indian women, give them a solid education, not external refinements, not mere outward improvements in dress and diet, but solid education, which embodies and purifies the heart.... If male education is



important, the education of women is infinitely more so, because we always find that no nation attains to any excellence, or greatness unless the women are properly educated”.

These quotations amply prove that Keshub Chunder was all out for emancipation of women. It is much to be wished that this truth is more largely appreciated and more keenly felt.

What Keshub Chunder did for his country? If we face this question we get many an answer. We can have a few of them.

(a) “Of all things Keshub Chunder will be held in the highest esteem for the stand he made against the denationalising and disintegrating forces of the day. What is only superficial in Western culture, what relates only to the exterior of life, made a heavy onslaught on Indian life in his time, and Keshub gave a powerful check to these disintegrating forces.” (S. Radhakrishnan 1931).

(b) “He was indeed the hero of the hour. The spiritual fervour of his powerful orations raised the moral tone of society as a whole and of the rising generations in particular”. (Subhas Chandra Bose, ‘An Indian Pilgrim’ P. 16)

(c) “Keshub Chunder Sen was in a special sense the creator of modern Bengali oratory. He held a high place in Bengali literature, and in the life and thoughts of Bengal... Keshub Chunder laid the foundation of the Swaraj movement by building up individual character upon the basis of freedom and purity.... Keshub Chunder Sen laid the foundation of the future Indian nation, (1) by inspiration of personal freedom which he gave to us, (2) by revelation of the truth of all religions and the great synthesis which he tried to make, and we want that light even today.” (Bipin Chandra Pal)

The above-quoted opinions forcefully put before us that this God-intoxicated man became the best spokesman of India. It is true that Keshub Chunder was a product of modern Bengal and belonged to the second group of English-educated Bengalis of

the nineteenth century. When Keshub was sent to the Hindu College in 1845 he came in contact with a band of young men, viz., Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Narendranath Sen, Chandra Madhab Ghosh, Satyendranath Tagore, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Kali Prasanna Sinha, Kristodas Pal, Manomohan Ghosh, Protap Chandra Mozoomdar. This group revolted against the age-long traditions of India. Most of them embraced whole-heartedly the Western culture and way of life. But they were reared up in a godless education. Keshub Chunder did not fall with them. He declared, "I did not know what right religion was. I did not know what true church was. Why or for what I prayed, I did not know. But in the first glimmer of light that came to me I heard the voice, 'Pray, pray, without prayer, there is no other way'. I did not learn this from Christian missionaries".

It can be said Keshub Chunder dived deep into the heart of India and derived a perennial and perpetual inspiration from age-old wisdom of India. He did preach this wisdom throughout his life, more so, in the year 1870, when he undertook extensive mission tour in England.

As a spokesman of India, he preached in England the message of India. In 1870 Keshub visited that country with a hope for a closer union between the East and the West. He delivered over seventy lectures within a span of seven months (February to September, 1870) heard by over forty thousand people. He presented to them not only a picture of the glorious heritage of India, but also the upsurge of modern India. He described the pitiable economic condition of India at that time and the evils of a foreign rule and enlisted the sympathy of the leaders and thinkers of England.

It is true that Keshub Chunder adopted 'loyalty' as a creed, since he believed in the British rule in India as providential. The main grounds of this belief were—(a) Unification of India under one democratic rule, (b) Removal of lawlessness, (c) Western education, (d) Independence of individual principles,



(e) Advent of Christ's messengers, and (f) Union of East and West. He believed that by the decree of Providence the Britishers were appointed rulers of India to act as Trustees and carry out the above subejcts. If they failed, they would not be there. There are defects in the British administration in India which were discussed and publicly exposed by Keshub Chunder with appeal for correction and remedy. The British would lead India to form a part of the Commonwealth of Nations in course of time was his vision.

In his lecture at the Metropolitan Tebernacle on May 24, 1870, Keshub Chunder dwelt upon the subject—"England's duties to India." In the beginning he submitted—"The light of truth has dawned over the hundred and eighty millions of its (India's) people. Undoubtedly it is mainly owing to British energy and British enterprise, and the exertions of that paternal Government under whose care Providence, in its inscrutable mercy, has placed my great country."

Then he claimed that he stood before the English audience as a representative of his country. In his words, "I stand on the platform as one who desires to represent the wants and wishes of all sections of the Indian community, so far as it is compatible with a sense of duty and conscience"

Further he said, "It is my firm conviction that you Englishmen stand there in India merely as trustees. You have no right to say that you will use its property, its riches, or its resources, or any of the privileges which God has given you, simply for the purpose of your own selfish aggrandizement and enjoyment. You are accountable to God for those millions of souls that have been placed in your hands as a sacred trust. You cannot hold India for the interest of Manchester, nor for the advantage of those merchants who go there and live as birds of passage for a time, and never feel an abiding interest in the country, because they really cannot do so. If you desire to hold India, you can only do so for the good and welfare of India."



The visit to England has brought before us Keshub as the spokesman of India. He spoke on Indian reforms, duties of England to India, temperance, education, higher education, female education, mass education in its various aspects; spiritual fellowship of humanity and social and religious freedom of man, Britain's responsibility in India, Britain's stewardship of India and peace problem, colour bar and excise policy.

The love took Keshub to the West where he went in the three capacities of a learner, a missionary, and an advocate. In his foreward to the book *Keshub Chunder Sen in England*, P.S. Basu emphasised that the realisation of God was the one constant aim of Keshub's life. This, Keshub maintained, was the destiny of every individual man. This realisation, never complete but ever becoming fuller, varied in its forms as age and country changed. Keshub wanted to see God's manifestations "in my Father's Western house". His object was "to survey Christian life in all its aspects and bearings."

Times without number Keshub sought to bring home to the English audience "the spirit of Christ,—by which I mean that true and sweet communion with God which Christ himself so greatly enjoyed, and in order to enjoy which, he used now and then to go up to the hills and mountains." Keshub emphasized, "If God, then, in the inscrutable designs of His providence, has the good things they ought to receive from each other, we should be able to form a true Church where spiritual fervour and activity of material civilization would harmonize, and form the unity of religious life."

"Providence has for wide and benevolent purpose connected the destinies of the two countries," Keshub declared in England. "If God, then, in the inscrutable designs of His providence, has knit together politically these great representatives of Asia and Europe—of the East and the West—namely, India and England—is there no moral significance in the fact?" Keshub posed this question before his audience in England.

Keshub pointed out, "Their political relationship, though outwardly political alone, has not been in the present case entirely political. It has been moral and spiritual, and I feel that the countries cannot unite together unless their souls unite."

Unfortunately there was a great barrier, P.S. Basu pointed out in his foreward, to the establishment of this unity. There was want of fairness and justice and humanity in England's dealings with India. Here Keshub Chunder stood forth as an advocate for his country's cause. "I come to plead the cause of India before the British public." Keshub declared, "I do not this evening represent any clique or sect, political or religious; I stand here as an humble representative of the people of India."

Here Keshub Chunder stood as the spokesman of India. Of all the speeches, a few stand apart in which Keshub forcefully and eloquently pleaded the case of India, e.g. the speech made at Tabernacle, London (May 24, 1870) and the speech made at the Philosophical Institution, Edinburgh (August 19, 1870).

In the speech delivered in Edinburgh—"The Religious and Social Condition of India", Keshub Chunder ably presented the case of India. He said, "In that great country (India), we find the results of an ancient civilization lying side by side with the achievements of modern thought and refinement. The mists of superstition and idolatry are vanishing before the light of modern science.... Idolatry and caste are being imperceptibly undermined by the effects of English education. The people are hankering after, and in many cases successfully achieving, a better and more improved social and domestic economy. Thus, intellectually, morally, and religiously, the country is making great strides,—to say nothing of material improvement."

Keshub reminded his audience the glory that was India. He said, "My countrymen in ancient times were famous for their philosophy and even theology. But today, India's face is hanged. She is not now what she was centuries ago. Superstitions and idolatrous notions crept in.... Distinctions of caste were established. The liberty which was accorded to women



was withdrawn..... And so, in the course of time, under an ignorant and bigoted priesthood, and under Mahomendan misrule and oppression, even the last vestiges of the ancient civilisation of India seemed well nigh obliterated. So today India is looking forward to you, and to all civilized nations in the world for help, in order that she may regain her former greatness. In regard to India, therefore, you must not look only into her condition today, but travel back in imagination thousands of years, and what she was in the ancient times of primitive Hindu simplicity and purity.”

Keshub firmly presented the case of India before his English audience, “The duty of all those who are trying to enlighten, educate, and civilize that great country (India) ought to be to establish modern civilization upon a firm and enduring national basis. The country will reject any other basis. Foreign customs a few of my countrymen may admire; a few, addicted to apishness, may adopt them; but after a time, all that will be gone—it will be altogether effaced. But if you succeed in establishing the work of reformation on the platform of national instincts and national ideas, and if you succeed in establishing all that is good and grand in England and Europe in the heart of India, then, I say, the work done will last for centuries.”

Keshub Chunder pointedly asked his audience, “Will you go there (to India) only to make money, and then come home; and will you not feel a moral interest in that country (India), in the welfare of the people? Will you not endeavour to bring about a harmonious feeling between the two races, conducive to mutual good?”

Concluding his speech, Keshub expressed his hope, “I hope and trust that they (British people) will cultivate friendly intercourse not merely with me, but with those whom I humbly represent tonight.”

Whenever Keshub gets any chance to project the image of India before the Western audience, he invariably utilised it.



Keshub delivered an address at the fifty-fourth anniversary of the Peace Society held on May 17, 1870, at Finsbury Chapel, Moorfields. He spoke against war and for peace. He began with these words: "I speak to you tonight as a Hindu. I assure you that I most thoroughly sympathize with the Peace Society in the great and noble object it has in view. If you ask me why I am opposed to war, I say at once I am so by nature, by education, and, above all, by religion."

Keshub ably presented India: "I belong to a race of people who are well-known as a very quiet and mild race. I come from India—a land which is inhabited by the Hindus, who love peace, who have an innate aversion and repugnance to war and hostility; I may therefore say I was born a lover of peace. Secondly, education confirmed what my national character taught me. The more I read English books, and the more my mind was imbued with Western liberal knowledge, the more I felt there was nothing so hateful as war."

Keshub always tried to put up a truthful image of India before the Western people. He was painfully conscious of the grave defects in the Indian character; he never sought to hide them. He said in a speech, "I love my own country, and it was that love which actuated me to bid farewell to my fellow-countrymen for a time and to visit this land. I now feel far more strongly than ever, that though sincerely interested in the welfare of my own country, it is my duty to point out the defects and shortcomings in her character and institutions, and to take all that is good, sacred, and noble in other nations."

Keshub Chunder is remembered today as one of the makers of our Renaissance. We also remember him as a great religious leader, the founder of a universal religion. We should also remember him as a spokesman of India.

In his lectures delivered in England, we find two pictures of Keshub Chunder Sen. He was an evangelist of a universal religion. Again he was a confirmed Indian. He declared in one of his lectures:

“I am a firm believer in the doctrines of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, and I now feel more deeply convinced than ever that it is possible to realize these great ideas in the world.... There is a great future before us, and England must join with us to realize it.... The true kingdom of God will not be realized, indeed can never be realized, unless the East and the West are joined together.... Just as in political, commercial, and worldly intercourse we always try, by mutual traffic, to exchange our commodities with those of other nations, so in the spiritual traffic going on in this world we are beginning to recognize that principle of exchange.”

Discussing the effect of his visit to England, Keshub declared himself a confirmed Indian. He said, “The result of my visit to England is that I came here an Indian, I go back a confirmed Indian; I came here a Theist, I return a confirmed Theist. I have learnt to love my own country more and more.... I came here a believer in the Fatherland of God and the Brotherhood of man, and I shall return confirmed in this belief. I have not accepted one single new doctrine that God had not put into my mind before; I have not accepted new dogmas or doctrines, but I have tried as far as possible to imbibe the blessed influence of Christian lives.... I am now, thank God, a man of the world, and can say that England is as much as my Father’s house as India.”

The Rev. Dr. James Drummond said, “His visit has brought strongly home to the mind of many in England the fact that our old feeling of separation is passing away, and that.... we are becoming more profoundly conscious of a common element of religion which binds together true men all over the world.”

Keshub Chunder did not mince his words when he dwelt on the subject—England’s duties to India. In his numerous speeches in public halls, churches and institutions Keshub pleaded for the promotion of education in India far and wide—including that of the women and of the masses, for



putting Indians in higher posts of responsibility and emolument, for the suppression of the liquor and opium traffic, for humane treatment of Indians by Englishmen and for ruling India for India's good. Keshub said to his English audience, "I hope and trust that merciful God who has called you to govern that nation will give you wisdom and strength, faith and piety, enough to rule over our race properly; if not, India will no longer be in your hands. You will be forced to leave India to herself, and we shall do our business in the best way we can."

Miss Carpenter admitted it when she discussed the effect of Keshub's visit on the people of England. According to her, "The visit of Baboo Keshub Chunder Sen to this country has inspired multitudes in every part of the kingdom, not only with sympathy and admiration for himself, but also with respect for the courageous and dignified manner in which he has acknowledged with gratitude what England has done for India, but told her solemnly of her duties to that vast country confided to her guardianship. A desire to help India has thus been awakened in this country."

Keshub's "Lectures in England" (two volumes 1881-82) bears the stamp of his eloquence, erudition, and powerful personality.

We should remember that Keshub Chunder Sen was the first spokesman of India in the West. Professor F. Max Mueller said, "Many of us saw him during his stay in England in 1870, listened to him, admired and loved him, and not a few have ever since remained united with him by the bonds of real friendship. He won the respect and love of hundreds and thousands from the highest to the lowest."

Keshub Chunder Sen described the pitiable condition of India at that time and the evils of the then foreign rule and enlisted the sympathy of the leaders of England. The inhabitants of Glasgow, in their address to Keshub, declared: "We welcome you, therefore, not only as a representative of others, but for yourself, as an earnest member of the great human



family whose home is the world, whose work-field is as wide as humanity, and whose one Great Father is God."

Keshub's stay in England was a constant triumph. "He had many personal characteristics," as the Indian 'Daily News' truly said, "which fitted him for religious work. A fine countenance, a majestic presence, and that rapt look which of itself exerts an almost irresistible fascination over impressible minds lent wonderful force to a swift, kindling and poetical oratory which married itself to his highly spiritual teaching as perfect music into noble words."

Before his departure for England and after his arrival from England, Keshub Chunder delivered two speeches which are important. The first was a farewell lecture on "England and India" delivered in the Town Hall, Calcutta (February 2, 1870). He said, "Fallen India cried for help, and at Heaven's bidding England hastened to her rescue. If here you do not recognize the finger of Providence; if here you do not vividly perceive the direct operation of God's special mercy for the salvation of nations, I do not know where you will.... The contact of England with India was providential, and not a mere accident. If we look beneath the surface we cannot fail to see the wise and beneficent arrangements of Divine economy.... As soon as the spirit of the English mind came in contact with the Indian mind, a great revolution commenced. Native society was shaken to its centre; all departments of Indian life were convulsed as if by some mysterious agency; and a series of most important reforms, political, intellectual, social and religious came in rapid succession."

After a successful tour of England, Keshub Chunder returned to India. When he reached Bombay he was very cordially received by friends there. The following evening (October 15, 1870), under the auspices of the Prarthana Samaj, he delivered in the Framjee Cowasjee Institute an address on "General Impressions of England and the English."

He said, "I cannot say that England as a religious nation is superior to the other nations of the world; England has yet much to learn from India. I now feel far more strongly than ever I did that it is the duty of India and England to cultivate close social and spiritual intercourse with each other.... Let then India learn from England practical righteousness; let England learn from India devotion, faith and prayer...."

Further he said, "You want to know what England has done and is going to do for us. They lionized me and made too much of me. I protested against it, the process of lionizing was painful to me. I went to discharge my duty humbly, but they put me on platforms and carried me from town to town and from province to province and from meeting to meeting. Thousands upon thousands came to hear me. I had some honest truths to tell. I said to the public of England that there were great defects in the political administration in India. Thousands of hands were raised on all sides indicating hearty appreciation of what I said; all stood up sometimes in order to show that dishonesty, oppression and injustice must be put down. Let Englishmen feel that your patriotism has not blinded you to the defects of your countrymen, and in the same breath point out the defects of character in English people here, they will receive your words. England requires only to be enlightened in order to do justice in India."

Further Keshub said, "Everything I said against denationalisation roused the sympathy of the British public. They are jealous about their own nationality. When I spoke as a patriot they felt I was a patriot and was justified in defending what was good and great in the institutions and religion of my country."

Truly, Keshub Chunder Sen was a patriot and the first spokesman of India in the West. Lord Ronaldshay, in his book, 'The Heart of Aryavarta', observes:

"He was too great a character to become a mere mimic of others, and he was too great a soul to cherish that false

pride of race which blinds a man to the virtues of all peoples other than his own. He showed how East and West might be complementary rather than antagonistic to one other, and his life was an incitement to those who might be willing to go so far as he did in casting aside the restraints and trammels of an ancient and venerable social tradition, at least to follow him in the spirit, if not in the actual letter of his teaching.

It was, then, due in large measure to the influence exerted by the lives of men like Keshub Chunder Sen that the violence of the swing back of the pendulum was moderated, and the possibility of synthesis of the best features of two distant civilisations raised itself upon the surface of the troubled waters of Indian life."

Be it admitted that Keshub Chunder Sen proclaimed the absolute freedom of the individual conscience from the bondage of caste and customs. Keshub Chunder's movement was, indeed, a movement of social revolt as well as moral awakening. For these reasons, Keshub Chunder Sen became a maker of modern India.



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